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## Negotiating Queenship from Malory to Shakespeare

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**Negotiating Queenship from Malory to Shakespeare**

**Elizabeth L. Glyn**

**PhD (Kings College London), 2015**

## Abstract

Queenship is a highly contested issue across the medieval and early modern periods, yet too often the subject is addressed as if those periods were discrete and distinct. In this thesis I assess certain selected literary and documentary representations of controversial queenship in the context of the history of such representations, to argue that artificial periodisation has hindered our understanding of discourses of queenship.

Over time representations of idealised queenship remain consistently aware of the overarching problem of female rule. Recurring allegations of misconduct and subversion by queens suggest ongoing anxieties about female power, which are visible too in the proliferation of medieval and early modern literary defences of queens. I focus in particular on the idea of intercessory queenship, considering how this alternates with active, and in some cases even military, queenship. In so doing, I will uncover the discursive limits of autonomy for royal women.

I consider a range of interconnected texts all of which use nostalgia for the past both to recreate and to question ideals of female influence. I begin by showing how Guenevere in Malory's *Morte Darthur* permits a defence of Margaret of Anjou which is not couched in terms of the norms of queenly subordination. I then show how Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays manifest disquiet at Margaret's militancy even while they create a portrait of an effective queen whose agency is entirely focussed on upholding her husband's sovereignty. I then turn to the unexpected interchangeability of Queens Katherine and Anne in *Henry VIII* through which Shakespeare and Fletcher dramatise counterintuitively parallel versions of female defiance; here, queenship appears to be set free from the dominant model of intercessory influence and yet remains benign. Finally, I shall argue that disquiet at the idea of female autonomy is apparent in the return to Amazonian themes in Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as well as in various court masques written for Queen Anna, wife to James I.

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## Introduction

In February 2013, to accompany the recent publication of her acclaimed fictional account of the life of Thomas Cromwell and the fall of Anne Boleyn, *Bring Up the Bodies*, Hilary Mantel wrote an essay in the *London Review of Books* in which she described the Duchess of Cambridge as a ‘jointed doll on which certain rags are hung .... a shop-window mannequin, with no personality of her own’.<sup>1</sup> Mantel generated a storm of protest, most of which mistook her words for criticism of the duchess’ personality rather than of ongoing social and political expectations that women play a silent, passive and mediative role. Mantel, it seems to me, simply pointed out that the assumption of silence does not sit comfortably in an age which, in theory at least, allows women political autonomy of their own. Although few commentators relayed any of the rest of her essay, in fact she went on to say that ‘in looking at royalty we are always looking at what is archaic, what is mysterious by its nature .... Royal persons are both gods and beasts’.<sup>2</sup> Mantel sees the depiction of royal women as *both* admirable *and* monstrous. In this thesis, I shall explore the ways in which discourses of queenship have conjured up such ‘gods and beasts’ and I shall identify unexpected patterns in literary, dramatic and historiographical treatments of royal women.

This thesis will take the form of a series of case studies in which I seek to uncover the discursive limits of autonomy for royal women. My primary focus is the plays of Shakespeare, but I begin with an inescapably medieval text, Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, to emphasise the continuities of representation of royal women across the periods we call “medieval” and “early modern”, and I will also address a series of works by playwrights and poets other than Shakespeare. In chapter 1, I will consider Malory’s new treatment of Guenevere in *Morte Darthur*. Malory, writing during the Wars of the Roses in the latter half of the fifteenth century, takes on an earlier romance tradition which portrayed the queen, Guenevere, as vindictive and destructive; he chooses the more benign version

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Mantel, ‘Royal Bodies’, *London Review of Books*, Vol 35, No. 4, 21 February 2013, 3-7 (p. 3).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Royal Bodies’, p. 5.

of her from the available sources – although he doesn't invent it. The Guenevere of *Morte Darthur*, as I shall show, is benevolent and astute; she defends herself and the honour of the king and she has a godly end. In chapter 1 I shall argue that changes to his presentation of Guenevere enable Malory to say more about queenship than he could by describing the contemporary, and highly controversial, queen Margaret of Anjou directly. No less than *Morte Darthur*, Shakespeare's early plays show a clear sense of their own place on a historical spectrum; I will move on in chapter 2 to consider Shakespeare's three *Henry VI* plays. Here I will argue that whilst Shakespeare's Margaret is vicious and bloodthirsty (the epitome of Mantel's 'beast'), she is also always clearly motivated by the need to protect her rights and the rights of her son and her husband. Even whilst Shakespeare's presentation of Margaret owes a great deal to medieval chronicle sources, it also makes deliberate use of romance archetypes in its depiction of her as heroic yet transgressive. In chapter 3 I turn my attention to Jacobean representations of late medieval queenship by identifying an unexpected interchangeability between Queens Katherine and Anne in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. This play does not simply balance an idealised queen against a malignant 'other', a virtuous queen against a subversive one: on the contrary, it subverts its sources so as to conflate these two women, Katherine and Anne. In the process, it presents a parallel version of female defiance which subverts historiographical 'truths'. In chapter 4 I will demonstrate that the presentation of female autonomy in the other extant Shakespeare/Fletcher collaboration, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, should be considered in the light of Queen Anna's court masques. By the time *Kinsmen* and the masques were composed, intercession had become explicitly oppositional and the valorisation of chastity rather than marriage had become subversive; I shall show how these texts articulate a newly circumscribed post-Elizabethan female power.

It is clear that I will not be providing a strictly chronological view of female sovereignty through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I will argue, instead, that the discourse of queenship refuses to abide by the artificial periodisation that separates the medieval from the early modern

and that commentators have failed to take enough account of the senses of history that dominate most texts about the subject of queenship. We shall see that representations of queenship don't steadily become more *modern* – in fact, they revert to earlier modes in certain political circumstances. Over the course of this thesis, too, I will demonstrate that the discourse of queenship over a long period, expressed in a variety of different texts from chronicle to dramatic, takes the form of an ongoing and often fractious negotiation between intercessory and autonomous, sometimes even militant, female power.

I shall show how Malory's new treatment of queenship in *Morte Darthur* – printed in 1485 by Caxton and circulated widely – feeds directly into the revival of a debate about Margaret's queenship in Shakespeare's earliest histories, written in the early 1590s. Shakespeare does not return to *de casibus* history until *Henry VIII*, written in 1613 in collaboration with John Fletcher. We shall see that the overarching link between his earliest work and his last is its medievalism; Shakespeare was at his least medievalist between 1593 and around 1612. The resurgence of interest late in his career suggests that it is contextual: the change of reign and the developing relationship between James and Anna causes him to return to his earlier concerns. My analysis of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* alongside the court masques written for James and his family in the first decade of the seventeenth century highlights continued concern about the nature and efficacy of female political agency. This concern, we shall see, links the medieval *Morte* with the Elizabethan and Jacobean material of my later chapters.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* uses Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, whilst *The Two Noble Kinsmen* uses *Dream* using *Knight's Tale*. In the proxy marriages of Anna and Hippolyta, the new addition of Guenevere's own knightly army, the linkage of Katherine with Griselda; in all these instances we shall see how various texts revive and renew old tales. In *3 Henry VI*, Clifford tells the King, 'I would your highness would depart the field. | The queen hath best success when you are absent', a near direct quotation of the early Tudor commentator Edward Hall's description of the

second battle of St Albans; Hall reports 'happy was the quene in her two battayls, but unfortunate was the kyng in all his enterprises, for where his person was present, ther victory fled euer from him to the other parte, and he commonly was subdued and vanqueshed'.<sup>3</sup> We shall see in Shakespeare's use of – and deviations from – his sources the process by which he crafts national history out of myth, romance, popular ballad, chronicle. All my selected texts represent deliberate interventions in pre-existing textual traditions; traditions which cover a range of genres and cross a range of historical periods.

These case studies make it clear that, on the one hand, there is a high degree of continuity from Malory to Jonson and that, on the other, representations of politically active queens do not fall into Mantel's clear-cut division of 'gods' and 'beasts'; rather, I will expose an ongoing negotiation between the virtues and the vices of queenly intervention. Crucially, too, there *is* space to talk positively about active queenship; there are active and yet feminine virtues in various textual representations even whilst those representations manifest anxiety about the implications of female sovereignty. We shall see, for example, that active queenship is allowed for and reinforced in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and even Shakespeare's Queen Margaret, the famous 'she-wolf of France', in the *Henry VI* plays is dramatised at times as a competent, effective queen whose agency is entirely focussed on upholding her husband's sovereignty. When texts show a queen departing from the intercessory model, representations of her are likely to be contested; she is seen as *both* transgressive *and* heroic.

Here in the introduction I will first provide a brief survey of scholarship on the subject of queenship, scholarship which often fails to question the complex relationship between literary representations of queenship and historiographical critiques of female power. I will then move on to discuss my methodological approach, considering in particular the critical tendency to 'periodise' our

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<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI*, ed. by John Cox and Eric Rasmussen, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (Michigan: Routledge, 2001), II.2.73-74. All subsequent references are to this edition; *Hall's Chronicle* (1908; New York 1965), p. 252.



understanding of texts and classify them according to outdated notions of the medieval and the Renaissance. Ultimately, I shall show that these artificial boundaries dividing the past into distinct and discrete periods have hindered our understanding of the terms of representation of powerful women across long periods; they force history into a linear narrative with a clear beginning and end, which is not the way in which texts are actually received or understood at the time of performance or publication. When we read Shakespeare's histories, for example, we are seeing the ongoing textual, literary and theatrical negotiation of a longstanding debate about history and about women's roles within it, one that can be traced at least as far back as Malory. In tracing wide and permanent trends in discourses of female power from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, I hope to show that the terms of expression in discourses of queenship remain surprisingly consistent *over time*.

A brief survey here will reveal several recurring assumptions operating in critiques of queenship. In general, critics have tended to assume that queens suffered from what they argue is the diminishing importance of household politics in the late Middle Ages and that queens in contemporaneous literary texts necessarily reflect that increasing marginalisation. Several well-respected critics have made the argument that the field of women's action was increasingly constricted across both the medieval and early modern periods; for example, Joan Kelly Gadol in her landmark essay, 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' describes the 'new constraints suffered by Renaissance women as the family and political life were restricted in the great transition from medieval feudal society to the early modern state'.<sup>4</sup> John C. Parsons argues along similar lines that, chronologically speaking, 'women's power is subordinated and controlled, largely by confining them to the domestic arena'.<sup>5</sup> Critics often approach medieval romance in the light of these assumptions;

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<sup>4</sup> Joan Kelly Gadol, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?', in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. by Renate Bridenthal and Susan M. Stuard (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), pp. 175-201 (p. 177).

<sup>5</sup> John C. Parsons, 'Ritual and Symbol in the English Queenship to 1500', in *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. by Louise O. Fradenburg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 60-77 (p. 60).

they tend to assume that the few female characters who do appear are typically confined to domestic settings and domestic roles.

An idealised vision of intercessory female power will recur throughout this thesis. Paul Strohm defines intercession as a form of influence that ‘casts the queen as one seeking redress rather than one able to institute redress in her own right ... it limits its objectives to the modification of a previously determined male resolve’.<sup>6</sup> Intercession represents a method by which women might influence their husbands whilst still remaining subject to male control. It relies on a performance of vulnerability – often visually portrayed in terms of kneeling – to effect change. We shall see that intercession as a form of both political and domestic influence is a recurring trope in the depiction of wives and queens, different from counsel because of its deliberate inscription of female vulnerability and subordination. The distinction between intercessory queenship and counsel will become clear in the conflict between Katherine of Aragon and Wolsey in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII*, for instance, where Henry’s reliance on Wolsey’s counsel emasculates him, whilst his acquiescence to Katherine’s pleas are seen by observers as the exercise of responsible kingship.

The subject of intercessory power has already inspired much critical debate. Several critics question whether intercession represents an alternate source of power for women, a power based on vulnerability, exclusion or marginalisation, or whether in fact intermediary power could enable political autonomy on a public stage. Parsons argues that ‘informal, relational areas allowed queens (and other wives) to traverse the cloudy limits between unofficial and official, margin and centre, “private” and “public”’, whilst Paul Strohm, among others, has expressed scepticism about ‘whether intercessory queenship, exercised from the margins and conditioned upon exclusion from worldly office, represented a genuinely alternative feminine power’.<sup>7</sup> According to Strohm, the queen is

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Strohm, ‘Queens as Intercessors’, in *Hochon’s Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Bloomington, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 95-121 (p. 95).

<sup>7</sup> John C. Parsons, *The Court and Household of Eleanor of Castile* (Toronto: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p. 249; Strohm, ‘Queens as Intercessors’, p. 96.

patron and intercessor and little else. In *The Politics of Adultery*, Peggy McCracken argues that queens play a minimal role in political structures because their official function is not to govern; a queen's major duty is to reproduce in order to guarantee succession and political and social stability. Throughout this thesis I shall show, on the contrary, that there *is* space to talk positively about active queenship, albeit under strict controls. In chapter 1, for example, I will argue that Malory's Guenevere *is*, in fact, vested with real political power; power that is not centred simply on her role as royal consort or even as sexual partner to Lancelot.

In their introduction to *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, Carole Levin and Robert Bucholz write that, 'for scholars, queens are interesting because they are anomalous and often liminal'.<sup>8</sup> I intend to demonstrate in this thesis that the most controversial queens are the ones who are explicitly described as violating this liminal role by taking on active, sometimes even military power. Phyllis Rackin has been probably the most influential recent critic to address Margaret of Anjou's controversial role in Shakespeare's early histories; she has argued that the women of the *Henry VI* plays represent 'opponents and subverters of the historiographical enterprise'.<sup>9</sup> I will argue, on the contrary, that Margaret is not merely a subverter of plot; she is in fact its primary agent. Aside from Rackin, however, whose work dates from the mid-eighties, we have to go back more than thirty years to find any substantive critical work on Margaret's function in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. I hope to redress the balance by offering a fresh view of Margaret, re-thinking Rackin's arguments and taking the debate in a new direction.

In this thesis I will consider the long-term transmission of ideals of intercession, and especially the changes that came about due to the emergence of regnant queenship – most notably, of course, during the long reign of Elizabeth I. David Wallace in *Strong Women* has argued that 'once

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<sup>8</sup> Carole Levin and Robert Bucholz, 'Introduction', in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. xiii-xxxiii (p.xiii).

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Rackin, 'Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories', *Theatre Journal*, 37.3 Staging Gender (October, 1985), 329-44 (p. 329).

a king can kill his queen, we lose the possibility of articulate, wifely mediation'.<sup>10</sup> He suggests here that the execution of Anne Boleyn marked the final nail in the coffin of a model of intercessory queenship. He later argues that it was, in fact, the emergence of regnant queenship which changed the presentation of queens forever by dismissing the intercessive, reactive form of influence recognisable up to that point in discussions about female power. Either way, we shall see here that those changes are not straightforward, nor are they readily accepted; in fact a model of idealised intercessory consort does recur in discourse dating from the period *following* a period of regnant queenship. Wallace's "forever" is clearly an overstatement.

Historical studies of the most controversial queens have generally been quick to accept the role of queen as one of representative rather than individual power. This might be clearly seen in historical research into Margaret of Anjou, and also into Henry VIII's first two wives, Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. In considering Margaret of Anjou, in part because of a lack of evidence, or at least because of the unavoidability of tainted evidence, modern historians such as Joanna Laynesmith and Helen Maurer deliberately focus on an understanding of queenship as an office, not as a study of individuals.<sup>11</sup> Even whilst they acknowledge that Margaret's story has been overshadowed by the 'she-wolf' characterisation of her by Shakespeare and various other Tudor commentators, historians tend to consider literary parallels of the period only cursorily. Maura Nolan refers to 'the genuinely historical nature of literary form' and argues that it must be identified alongside the 'formal nature of human apprehensions of history'.<sup>12</sup> Fictive and ideological accounts of queenship inform historical documents; hence we can read how queens were perceived by paying attention to fiction. Miri Rubin's *The Hollow Crown* exemplifies historians' instincts to regard literary

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<sup>10</sup> David Wallace, *Strong Women: Life, Text and Territory 1347-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. xxiv.

<sup>11</sup> Joanna Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: Medieval Queenship 1445-1503* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2004); Helen E. Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Maura Nolan, 'Historicism after Historicism' in Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico, eds., *Post Historical Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 63-87 (p. 70).

sources as purely fictional even whilst accepting historiography as essentially truthful.<sup>13</sup> And in her recent monograph about controversial women in the medieval period, Helen Castor warns in respect of Margaret that 'it has become almost impossible not to see her through the wrong end of the historical telescope'.<sup>14</sup> Despite this acknowledgement, there is little evidence of scepticism about textual sources in Castor's work and she pays little attention to the Tudor bias to most surviving sources. In general, historians who look closely at Margaret fail to acknowledge the impact of pre-existing stereotypes about transgressive women on contemporaneous historiography.

When it comes to Katherine and Anne, contemporary historiography is dominated by a generic and generalised contest between opposing court and religious representatives; even recent historians describe these women in terms of opposing stereotypes. Anne Boleyn was, and is, such a contentious figure that depictions of her are either adulatory or hostile. The historian Eric Ives describes Anne as an important political player in the struggle with Rome and as a 'self-made woman ... [who] was where she was by virtue of her own abilities and what she had made of herself, not by virtue of wealth or family'; whilst G.W. Bernard confuses the question of Anne's participation in religious factionalism with her guilt or innocence of the charges brought against her in 1536; he entirely dismisses suggestions that Anne inspired England's break with Rome and argues instead that her flirtatious behaviour paved the way for her fall from power, concluding that 'the likelihood is that Anne and at least some of her friends were guilty of the charges brought against them'.<sup>15</sup> In historiography which tends to set Anne against Katherine, we shall see that the terms of expression of defence and condemnation adopt strikingly standardised forms. It stands to reason that we must be careful of reading historiographical texts without reading them in the context of their own textual histories because the repetitions and similarities in depictions of controversial women make clear

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<sup>13</sup> Miri Rubin, *The Hollow Crown: A History of Britain in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Helen Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women who Ruled England before Elizabeth* (Cambridge: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 339.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 186; G. W. Bernard, 'The Fall of Anne Boleyn', *EHR*, 106 (1991), 584-610 (p. 609).

our reliance on a fairly limited vocabulary to describe different models of queenship; the language of queenship is circumscribed by its own history.

The Jacobean court masques offer another, later, manifestation of the problematical representation of queenship that I am tracing in this thesis. Literary critics have addressed in particular the question of the extent to which the masques offer a new public forum for mediation between the queen's maternal and public political roles in the reigns of James I and Charles I. Influential work by Stephen Orgel in the mid-seventies posited the masques' presentation of queenship as an important element of the new king James's attempt to proclaim limitations on female power.<sup>16</sup> Orgel saw the masques as attempting to circumscribe female power by relegating the queen's role to a familial and intermediary one. More recently, however, Clare McManus and other feminist critics have argued that the representation of the female masquers in fact celebrates female power rather than simply praising the authority of James I.<sup>17</sup> McManus' work focuses in particular on the masques' role in the construction of the identity of court and courtier and its gender dynamics. She sees the masques as a form which enables the public assertion of female autonomy and she argues that the new masque form offers a new (and newly threatening) source of public power for queens; masques transfer the tools of constraint (i.e. enforced silence) into the means for autonomous expression (i.e. physical performance). The fact is that the masques manifest concerns about queenship that we have seen before. In chapter 4 I will show how their emphasis on limiting female autonomy is profoundly tied up with their sense of queenship's own literary history. For the most part, critics have failed to consider the court masques' self-consciousness about their own historicity, and I hope to propose a new debate on this matter.

I will now briefly consider my own methodological approach to the question of problematised representations of historical queenship. The question I will be asking of my materials

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Power in the English Renaissance* (Stanford: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court 1590-1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

is how textual representations of queens work both to create a sense of their power and yet also work against them. As this suggests, my own stance is that of a post-New Historicist – that is, as someone working consciously in the wake of new historicism but aiming to modulate some of new historicism’s oversimplifications. The earliest generation of historicist critics saw literature *only* in terms of its historical context; traditional historicism insisted that texts only acquire meanings in the light of their historical contexts. It engendered a canonical understanding of texts, a hierarchy of texts based on an ideal of historical truth. Traditional historicism’s weaknesses become clearly visible in chapter 2 in my analysis of E. M. W. Tillyard’s explanation of the *Henry VI* plays as a single meta-narrative depicting a cycle of despair resolved only by the inauguration of the Tudor dynasty. I shall show that Tillyard’s vision entirely fails to take account of the complex moral and political problems embedded within all three plays.<sup>18</sup>

The New Historicist movement which emerged in the late 1970s also considered literature as an important tool for the representation of history; in other words, New Historicists also thought we could learn something about, say, Queen Elizabeth by reading *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Unlike traditional historicists, though, New Historicists expressed scepticism about any clear-cut distinction between historical and literary texts; they treated *all* sources as texts – that is, as verbal textures that can be mined for cultural information by way of a range of interpretative strategies – deliberately blurring the boundary between what is history and what is fiction, between literary and non-literary discourses. New Historicists argue that since all texts are embedded in specific social, political and cultural contexts, no knowledge exists outside the process of recording it; *all* knowledge is textual. In *Hochon’s Arrow*, Paul Strohm defines the key questions which occupy New Historicist critics: what do we mean by ‘history’, and how must we acknowledge its claims? He argues that ‘fictive elements teem within historical narratives’, insisting that ‘fictionality is not an

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<sup>18</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (London: Penguin, 1943).

embarrassment to a text's historicity', but rather that it is an intrinsic and valuable part of it.<sup>19</sup> He suggests that we consider fictive elements as history – not so much as a record of what happened, but of what *might* have happened; because they are composed within history, they offer historical evidence in their own right.

Strohm explores the question of intercessory queenship in the light of this New Historicist technique. For instance, he analyses Jean Froissart's depiction of a pregnant queen Philippa falling to her knees before her husband Edward III to beg for the lives of the Burghers of Calais who had displeased him by repelling his army.<sup>20</sup> Strohm's point is that Philippa's intercession may not have actually happened, yet it contains 'historicity' in other respects; in its reference to concerns about the king's need for counsel, its expectations for public kingship and for intercessory queenship, its portrait of subjects' search for protection against royal prerogative and so on. In this thesis I intend to cross-reference literary sources with historical, which will entail the deliberate blurring of structural differences between texts – their purposes, their authorship, their functions. I agree with Strohm that fictionality is an unacknowledged aspect of historiographical texts; I shall show that the self-conscious aspiration to historicise is a part of many texts (for example, romance) which are usually considered solely fictive.

Historicism for years tended to preserve the idea of 'the medieval' as a single period susceptible to categorisation. For example, Peter Burke, writing in 1967, offered the sweeping and generalising argument that '[d]uring the whole millennium 400-1400, there was no 'sense of history' even among the educated'.<sup>21</sup> Along similar lines, Thomas Greene describes the medieval period as a time of 'diachronic innocence'; in other words, he assumes a total lack of self-consciousness about antiquity and historical sources that is demonstrably untrue.<sup>22</sup> Both traditional historicism and its

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<sup>19</sup> Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 4; p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1967), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 30.



newer form have fallen out of favour in recent years because of their apparent working assumption that a given historical moment represents the whole spirit of its age, that a single text can represent 'an expressive totality' that tells us about an entire age.<sup>23</sup> New Historicists tended to adopt these assumptions without investigating them; as recently as 2011, Stephen Greenblatt's celebrated *The Swerve* argued that the emergence of consciousness, desire and individuality can be attributed to an epiphany that occurred in at a precise moment in the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> At that moment, the world, according to Greenblatt, suddenly and unexpectedly changed direction.

Medievalists' responses to new historicism have foregrounded some of the limitations of New Historicist methodology in helpful ways. David Aers argued against the 'systematic and institutional amnesia' that has turned the Middle Ages into one homogeneous field, singling out Greenblatt in particular for failing to consider the medieval and early modern as one continuum.<sup>25</sup> Lee Patterson has also drawn attention to New Historicists' generalising instincts about the Middle Ages, declaring that 'a specialist in Shakespeare and Early Modern literature simply does not read the texts of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England'.<sup>26</sup> In their collection of essays called *Cultural Reformations*, James Simpson and Brian Cummings called for contributors across a multitude of cultural and scholarly bases as they set out to re-draw hitherto fixed historical categories; they point out that universities, schools, theatres, libraries have all tended to organise themselves using a false dividing line, a 'synchronic boundary' between pre- and post-Reformation literary discourse.<sup>27</sup> Margreta de Grazia has also persuasively argued that this common categorisation of history actually

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Strohm, 'Historicity without Historicism?', *Postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, No. 1 (2010), 380-391 (p. 381).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the 'History of the Subject'', in *Culture and History 1350-1660: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 177-202 (p. 179).

<sup>26</sup> Lee Patterson, 'On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies', *Speculum*, Vol. 65, No.1 (Jan, 1990), 87-108 (p. 99).

<sup>27</sup> Brian Cummings and James Simpson, *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

privileges the early modern over the medieval; she suggests that a dichotomy between the two operates as 'one big value judgement' which has the consequence of presenting the idea of the modern as good, or at least inevitable, and the medieval as outdated or primitive.<sup>28</sup> Again Greenblatt inadvertently proves the point; in *The Swerve* he dismisses the medieval for what he sees as a 'preoccupation with angels and demons' compared with the sophisticated secularity of the Renaissance.<sup>29</sup> Despite the work of Aers' and others, then, it seems the myth of medieval primitivism has not been entirely dispelled.

In his essay 'Historicity without Historicism', Paul Strohm re-situates himself as a post-New Historicist; the awareness of textual variety and the ideal of history as textual is still acceptable, but he argues that the assumption of synchronous consistency common to New Historicist readings is manifestly incorrect. Synchronicity is unattainable because historical patterns are not ordered or stable, he argues that 'time is always out of joint, contradictory, strange to itself [...] the collision of past and future in each moment's evanescent now challenges the very practice of thinking by 'period' or age".<sup>30</sup> Strohm urges readers to distinguish carefully between 'historicity' and 'historicism'; 'historicity' meaning the mark of history upon a text, and 'historicism' meaning the method by which that history is given form and expression. He makes the point that we must look at *both* historicity and historicism; the *effect* of its expression of time and its own past, and also the *form* by which the marks of history are expressed on the page or on stage. In short, medievalists such as Strohm have shown a degree of scepticism about earlier versions of new historicism even whilst they affirm new historicism's injunction always to read the pressures of history upon form, structure, theme.

Of course, we do not want to read fiction *only* for what it tells us about history. It *is* a part of historiography, though, and I think must be considered alongside it; the deliberately nostalgic

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<sup>28</sup> Margreta de Grazia, 'The Modern Divide: From Either Side', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37.2 (Fall, 2007), 453-67 (p. 453).

<sup>29</sup> *The Swerve*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> 'Historicity without Historicism', p. 393.

recreation of an imaginary past tells us something about the present too. My aim is to explore the self-conscious use of a sense of history, not to use literary texts to identify an absolute historical truth. Genre clearly plays an important part in this construction of historicity; my analysis of the performance history of the three parts of *Henry VI* will show the extent to which every production of the play recreates the preoccupations of the time of its production as much as of its composition. I shall show too how Margaret's reputation has been affected by the problematic editorial history of the *Henry VI* plays. Tales of Margaret's extreme viciousness were for the most part early Tudor inventions, written by historians keen to portray the Lancastrian wars as spurious and the sign of a kingdom in disrepair awaiting a new and glorious king who could reunite the country; romance tropes about female villainy imprint themselves upon historicity as well as the other way round.

I have tried to consider how the self-consciousness about history manifested in all my texts enforces a re-consideration of tropes of queenship. I hope to identify what my selected texts tell us about a recurring 'problem' of female autonomy over time, as well as the failure of male sovereignty that engenders it. As far as representations of queenship – and in particular of intercessory queenship – are concerned, it will become clear that there is no absolute divide between the medieval and the early modern. Instead, I seek to prove that queenship is a highly contested issue in writing *across* these periods. Assessing various representations of controversial queenship in the context of the history of such representations will allow me to show clearly how artificial periodisation has hindered our understanding of literary treatments of historical queens and that echoes across time are to be found in a multiplicity of texts which all show clear senses of their own textual histories.

Shakespeare himself repeatedly represents the temporal boundary between the medieval and the contemporary view of his audience as being porous, to say the least. In dramatising Margaret, he was writing for an audience which was only a few generations away from the events presented on stage. For this reason, a deep concern about history, textual authority and the

distortions of nostalgia and myth run throughout Shakespeare's history plays, something that is clear especially in the medievalism of the *Henry VI* plays with their contrived 'impression of pastness'.<sup>31</sup>

His re-enactment of history is both immediate and contextualising *and* at the same time it is distancing, as we see from the famous Prologue at the start of *Henry V*, in which the Chorus famously asks if it is possible that we 'cram | Within this wooden O the very casques | That did affright the air at Agincourt?'; the act of asking the audience to ignore theatrical artifice and context also draws the audience's attention to it.<sup>32</sup>

In the recent collection *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents*, Peter Holland sees Shakespeare as offering 'a theory of history' in his plays, by which he means they use their historical framework to present a theatrical vision of Englishness in general. His early histories, as I shall show, bear the clear imprint of romance; they present a version of what *might* have happened, in which Shakespeare freely adapts his historical sources by adding anachronism, elements of romance and origin myth. Holland argues that the plays' uses of archaism and nostalgia enable them to re-create the history of the moment of their own production and this is also true of his late plays written for the new king.<sup>33</sup> In the same book, Helen Cooper sees Shakespeare as expressing internal conflict in terms of medieval vices and virtues as she demonstrates how important and pervasive is the idea of the medieval in Shakespeare's conception of developing English nationhood and culture.<sup>34</sup>

Shakespeare's methodological decisions show considerable self-consciousness about his historical sources, as will become clear throughout this thesis. In considering the arc between his *Henry VI* plays and his final collaboration, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, I seek to show how Shakespeare's approach to medievalism and archaism changes over the course of his career.

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<sup>31</sup> Bruce R. Smith, 'Shakespeare's Middle Ages', in *Medieval Shakespeare: Past and Presents*, ed. by Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 19-36 (p. 21).

<sup>32</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. by T. W. Craik, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (London: Routledge, 1995), Prologue, ll. 12-14. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Holland, 'Performing the Middle Ages', in *Medieval Shakespeare*, pp. 204-222 (p. 213).

<sup>34</sup> Helen Cooper, 'The afterlife of Personification', in *Medieval Shakespeare*, pp. 98-116.

In *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, Curtis Perry and John Watkins argue that our knowledge of history rests on 'Shakespeare's invention of the Middle Ages'; it was Shakespeare, in other words, who decided which of the English medieval kings we know and care about today.<sup>35</sup> Their book contains the important reminder that in looking at Shakespeare as the inventor of the Middle Ages, we accidentally re-affirm the divide between an early modern period which is self-aware and a medieval that is ignorant or lacking consciousness. William Kuskin's essay, 'Recursive Origins', in the same book inadvertently fulfils this warning by arguing that '2 *Henry VI* actively subordinates 15<sup>th</sup> century writing'; by contrast in chapter 2 I argue that Shakespeare's use of romance in fact does precisely the opposite.<sup>36</sup> As romance is reinserted into history, I shall suggest that what David Bevington calls the 'imprint of romance' works to collapse traditional period divisions.<sup>37</sup> It will become clear that an archaised romance form, despite its formalised style, can expose contemporaneous expectations for society, for women, for leadership. If, as Perry and Watkins claim, Shakespeare created English national history – given the five-hour queues around the block of Leicester Cathedral in the week of the burial of Richard III it certainly seems as though he did – he did so using romance as well as historiography.

In chapter 1, I shall consider how Malory uses his literary sources to suggest a version of queenship which lies outside the limits of traditional historiography. Several modern critics have made the link between Malory's work and the turbulence of the late fifteenth century, particularly in the breakdown and civil dissent of its final books. For example, Jonathan Hughes has argued that the *Morte Darthur* represents a search for new national identity and selfhood amidst the disorder and

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<sup>35</sup> Curtis Perry and John Watkins, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Curtis Perry and John Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-21 (p. 3).

<sup>36</sup> William Kuskin, 'Recursive Origins: Print History and Shakespeare's 2 *Henry VI*' in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, pp. 126-150 (p. 130).

<sup>37</sup> David Bevington, 'Conclusion: The evil of 'medieval'', in *Medieval Shakespeare*, pp. 223-237 (p. 236).

chaos of Henry VI's reign.<sup>38</sup> Kenneth L. Hodges' *Forging Chivalric Communities* asks how Malory's chivalric emphasis might address the political concerns of his day, and Thomas H. Crofts discusses the 'historical specificity' of Malory's Roman war, arguing that there are several ways in which Malory's Arthurian romance corresponds to 'the history of its period'.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, *Morte Darthur* reflects anxiety about the deposition of a lawful king, and readers might reasonably recognise the narrator's famous outburst in Book 8 as a comment on the treachery of usurpation, an allusion to contemporary civil strife: 'lo ye all englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff there was? ... [T]hys ys a greate defaughte of us englysshemen, for there may nothyng us please no terme.'<sup>40</sup> Understanding Malory's portrait of Guenevere as a version of Margaret of Anjou enables me to show clearly how literature portrays controversial queenship in ways that history cannot; in short, I will show how literary texts fictionalise history even whilst they reconstruct it.

Although it is possible to perceive historical resonances within fictional descriptions, we must always remember that those similarities are not constant and fixed. Malory's new treatments of Guenevere's resistance to Mordred and Mellyagant and Mordred's insurrection contain indications of the political conflicts of the time in which they were composed. But they are not strictly allegorical: problems arise when critics read literary texts *only* as encoded representations of contemporary events because they make assumptions about uniformity of meanings that are often unsustainable. Purely allegorical readings can reflect a narrow literalism that fixates on minor allusions as much as on major structural ideas. The *Henry VI* plays' medievalism works *both* to distance them from contemporary comment *and* to draw attention to contemporary political

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth L. Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory's le Morte Darthur* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 7; Thomas H. Crofts, *Malory's Contemporary Audience* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> *Malory's Works*, ed. by Eugene Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), Book 8, p. 708. Subsequent references will be to this edition by book and page number.

problems of female rule. Their medievalism does not provide, as Tillyard would have us believe, a straightforwardly laudatory and providentialist view of the glorious ascension of the Tudor dynasty.

Contested critical readings of an ostensibly very different kind of play – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – offer a useful example of the extent to which critics have sought allegorical certainties in texts that cannot support them, a subject which I will examine more closely in chapter 4. The twentieth-century critical debate about *Dream* shows clearly how critics can misrepresent or exaggerate texts' portrayal of contemporary political issues. In 1923, Edith Rickert suggested that the popularity of the allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene* in the 1580s meant that 'everything had pointed the way for political allegory in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*' written at around the same time.<sup>41</sup> Yet her article fails to do any actual analysis of the play itself: context swamps text. Three decades later, Paul A. Olson reads *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as another kind of allegory – as an allegorical rendition of the Renaissance interest in marriage as the representation of proper political order.<sup>42</sup> Olson's reading misses the ambivalence inherent in the play's treatment of its marital theme. Simply to assume that Theseus represents 'the reasonable man and the ideal ruler' and that Hippolyta stands for 'a false usurpation of the duties of the male reason by the lower female passions', as Olson does, is to ignore various signs of conflict in the play, such as Hippolyta's ambiguous silence (in response to the famous words, 'I woo'd thee with my sword'), silence which can be presented in performance as submission, defiance or resistance.<sup>43</sup> *Dream* does not offer a traditional celebration of marriage; on the contrary, it specifically calls into question the nature of mutuality in marriage and raises the potential for serious conflict. Overly generalising allegorical readings of *Dream* continue to fascinate critics; I will show in chapter 4 that the current critic Maurice Hunt unwittingly shows us why we must treat allegorical readings of texts with caution. In

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<sup>41</sup> Edith Rickert, 'Political Propaganda and Satire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Nov, 1923), 133-54 (p. 138).

<sup>42</sup> Paul A. Olsen, 'A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Meaning of Court Marriage', *ELH*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June, 1957), 95-119.

<sup>43</sup> Olsen, 'Dream and the Meaning of Court Marriage', p. 101; p. 102.

my analysis I have tried to allow for the complexities of allegory, for the transient, localised nature of allegorical identifications without descending to triviality or losing sight of the text in preference for context. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the masques, *Morte Darthur*; all contain specific awareness of context yet none of them operate straightforwardly as *roman á clef*.

I will begin chapter 1 by showing how expectations for good queenship can be identified by analysing the contemporary historiography depicting Margaret of Anjou's leadership of the Lancastrian campaign. The complex histories of the conflicts of the fifteenth century and of Henry of Lancaster's disastrous reign often place an emphasis on a range of queenly virtues regarded as feminine (mercy, gentleness, pity, compassion) – the complete opposite to Margaret, in other words. Intercessory queenship is repeatedly described by way of analogy to Griselda as an exemplar of an idealised form of feminine influence that derives its power through mediation and subordination. This idealisation of intercessory queenship is, in part, a reaction to hostility to Margaret in contemporary historiography, historiography which sought to bolster Henry Tudor's precarious claim to the English throne and diminish that of his competitors.

Although intercessory power is an important strand in defences of queens, I will show that it is not the only conventional queenly virtue: we shall see various instances of contemporary evidence that appears to support the idea that a queen could have an active political role. In chapter 1, I will suggest that Malory's Guenevere, read contextually, permits a defence of queenship which is not couched in terms of the norms of subordination. Guenevere has an heroic end: although her autonomy is famously destructive, it also yields penitence and spiritual redemption not only for herself, but also for Malory's great hero, Lancelot. Guenevere is the main defender of virtue in the early books of *Morte Darthur*; I will show that this emphasis on her peacemaking function is unique to Malory, although in many other respects he stays pretty close to his sources. Unlike earlier versions of the Arthurian tale, Malory offers a vision of active military queenship as virtuous and loyal. It is precisely those instances where Malory's text diverges from its sources, as I will show,



which yield an enhanced vision of queenly military activity as virtuous and feminine. In chapter 1 I will argue that we might read Guenevere as one possible defence of Margaret and of a proactive queenship that challenges the traditional historiography which calls for subservient, intercessory queenship.

In chapter 2 I will discuss Shakespeare's treatment of Margaret of Anjou as I seek to demonstrate that there is no clear divide between the medieval and the early modern treatments of controversial queens. Here I consider how Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays manifest disquiet at Margaret's militancy even while they create a portrait of an effective queen whose agency is focussed on upholding her husband's sovereignty. I will argue, contrary to current critical consensus, that Margaret is not merely a subverter of plot; she is its main agent. In section I, I will suggest that she is central to the organisation of plot and political structure in *Henry VI*. I will also consider the extent to which the portrayal of the queen changes between folios, and what might we conclude about women's roles in these plays from a reading of the textual instabilities of the *Henry VI* plays and various editorial decisions that have been made about the texts. No less than *Morte Darthur*, Shakespeare's early plays show a clear sense of their own place on a historical spectrum. Traditional historicists such as Emrys Jones in *The Origins of Shakespeare* were very aware of Shakespeare's debt to the medieval but a later generation of New Historicists paid little attention to it.<sup>44</sup> Only recently has scholarship started to acknowledge again Shakespeare's debts to medieval cultural tradition; the current wave of work on Shakespeare and the medieval really represents a post-New Historicist rediscovery of old historicist knowledge. Like Malory, Shakespeare makes clear use of hostile historiography that portrays Margaret as an usurper of power, and yet he too allows glimpses of autonomous leadership in which she is effective and sovereign-like. In section II of chapter 2, I will demonstrate that the presentation of Margaret owes a great deal to medieval chronicle sources, even while it also makes deliberate use of romance archetypes. It is in studying Shakespeare's

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<sup>44</sup> Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

sources but especially in reflecting on his deviation from those sources, that we will find evidence about how the three plays about Henry VI operate as a unique study of female agency.

Next I will turn my attention to the early seventeenth century, to Jacobean representations of late medieval queenship, by identifying an unexpected interchangeability between Queens Katherine and Anne in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. There is an obvious temporal leap here between chapters 2 and 3; of course, there are many politically important female figures who occupy the gap between Shakespeare's composition of his *Henry VI* plays and 1613, when he wrote *Henry VIII* in collaboration with John Fletcher: Cleopatra, Goneril, Lady Macbeth, to name a few. I am jumping across the main period of Shakespeare's creativity, it seems. However, my purpose in this thesis is not to offer an exhaustive study of Shakespeare's women. On the contrary, my intention is to use Shakespeare as the temporal centre-point in my consideration of the developing representation of female power *over time*. I am looking at changes in the treatment of powerful women in the period before, during, and after, the inauguration of regnant queenship in order to identify its permanent impact. This thesis is really about the extent to which regnant queenship changes – or fails to change – the portrayal of powerful women and the consideration of Shakespeare's earliest plays in comparison to his last plays helps me to do that without necessitating a complete canonical discussion. In a broader sense, the narrative arc stretching from Malory in the late fifteenth century through to Jonson's court masques written in the early seventeenth century, serves to show how representations of queens work to re-frame and re-cast medieval tropes of intercession over time.

In chapter 3, I will argue that the interchangeability between Katherine and Anne in *Henry VIII* enables the collaborators to dramatise parallel versions of female defiance. After the more 'modern' linear narrative structure of the second tetralogy and then a gap of over a decade during which Shakespeare did not write English history plays, *Henry VIII* is in certain ways a return to a medieval form, that of *de casibus* history. It re-frames controversies about queenship by re-focussing

on chivalric myth; and it subverts audience expectations by using romance tropes to create a wholly unexpected – and counterfactual – alliance between two women typically represented by historians as being diametrically opposed, and thereby to distance Anne Boleyn (and her daughter Elizabeth) from controversy. In section I, I will look at the form which allegations and defences take in their portrayals of these two women, considering in particular what patterns can be identified in the terms of abuse and criticism and how they work to set one queen up *against* another. In contemporary historiography these two queens are nearly always seen in contrast to one another; King Henry himself set up this historical contest when he elevated Anne to queen and demoted Katherine to widow of his dead brother Arthur. Usually, these two women become symbols of a broader religious or familial affiliation; for example, sources which focus on Anne's supposed sexual deviancy often do so as a way of drawing attention to Katherine's humility and her chastity. Even modern historians tend to see Katherine and Anne in terms of this dichotomy. Defences of these women also fall into well established and ritualised forms: in section II I will consider several of these defences, demonstrating how their generic natures create echoes between Katherine and Anne which have not been fully recognised. I shall show, for example, how John Foxe's defence of Anne Boleyn takes on thematic and descriptive structures similar to those of William Forrest's defence of Katherine, *The History of Grisild the Second*.

In the final section of chapter 3, I will argue that something even more unexpected happens in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. This play does not simply balance an idealised queen against a malignant 'other', a virtuous queen against a subversive: on the contrary, it subverts its sources so as to conflate these two women, Katherine and Anne. We saw in chapters 1 and 2 that an absent king requires an active queen. In *Henry VIII* the political authority of the king and his popularity are bolstered by Katherine: she moderates Henry's weak political decisions, she represents the voice of the people and she re-connects him to popular opinion. The conflation of the vulnerable and spiritual Katherine with the sexually and ethically problematic Anne Boleyn has the

effect of re-incorporating the latter into the political mainstream; sexual transgression is re-aligned with an heroic resistance to masculine presumption.

I have shown in earlier chapters how autonomous female power flares up both before and after Elizabeth I, despite efforts to circumscribe it. Throughout this thesis, I show that literary representations of historical queens reflect constant concern about their proximity to power; discourse offers ongoing and often fractious negotiation between intercessory and autonomous, even militant, female power. In chapter 4 I argue that queenly autonomy gets reined in as the medieval model of intercessory queenship reasserts itself in the masques of the new Jacobean court. In section I, I will consider the shift from the chaste, silenced sovereign queen of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the explicit militarism of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, two plays linked by a common source.

The continuing critical debate over the earliest performance history of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* draws attention to the gaps in knowledge that remain when it comes to detail about Shakespeare's original audiences; the play is highly unusual if, as is claimed, it was intended for private performance. For the most part, Shakespeare's early plays were performed to a heterogeneous audience in the outdoor playhouses; audiences were mixed by gender, class and age. By contrast, the new Blackfriars theatre, which was re-occupied by the Kings' Men in 1609, was situated in a wealthier part of town, closer to Westminster, and it is likely that considerably higher prices skewed the composition of audiences towards more affluent members. This might account for the fact that in Shakespeare's last plays, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, we witness a return to more courtly themes. Jonson's masques were certainly intended to celebrate and flatter their aristocratic audiences, which was arranged in a hierarchical manner with the King at the centre; both James and Anna of Denmark used invitations to masques as a form of political patronage. The breadth and variety of audience experiences will become clear over the course of this thesis. Critical work on my various texts tends to ignore aspects of queenship which their first readers or audiences

would have recognised – throughout my thesis I have tried to take account of what contemporary readers and audiences would have known about historical queenship.

I will suggest that *Kinsmen* is a Jacobean revival and rejection of the Elizabethanism of *Dream*; it represents an effort to dismantle the warrior or virgin queen, and to retool her as an intercessory consort. The gap here between Elizabethan and Jacobean manifestations of queenship suggests that even the fact of a queen regnant did not permanently change prospects for queens' self-expression; once Elizabeth was dead, prior modes appear to reassert themselves. Furthermore, a proliferation of texts written around this time show clear concern about the prospect of female militancy. For example, John Fletcher in his solo play, *Bonduca*, offers a vision of militant queenship written just before his collaboration with Shakespeare on *Kinsmen*; here, too, the return to Amazonian themes in the wake of Elizabeth's death articulates grave disquiet at the idea of female autonomy.

In section II, I will consider the new generic deployment of queenship articulated in the creation of court masques. This is a new form of staging women's power, and a form in which for the first time the queen herself has significant input. I argue that because of the masques' interest in an heroic past, their *historical* perspectives on queenship, and their interest in female militancy, they can helpfully be looked at alongside *Kinsmen* (which itself contains a scene mockingly drawn from a masque). I will argue that the court masques, like *Kinsmen*, envisage a reversion from absolutism and militancy to negotiation; they point towards a new intercessory queenship, but it is one that is firmly rooted in the past. Anna and her court writers would have been well aware of longstanding discourses on queenship, including those deployed by Shakespeare, and these court masques are often self-consciously historical. *Kinsmen* and Anna's masques are alike in valorising male power; they both call for the suppression of female militancy and compliant marriage as a means of re-affirming patriarchal power in the wake of the death of Elizabeth.

In summary, this thesis seeks to show how textual representations of historical queens reflect concern about women's proximity to power and their ability to exert political influence. My central claim will be that representations of queens continue to take the form of an ongoing, sometimes fractious, negotiation between intercessory and autonomous female power. We see that an ideal of intercessory power – power derived through mediation and vulnerability – recurs throughout discourses on queenship dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although autonomy *is* an inherent part of the performance of queenship, at the same time it is often described in terms of tension and suspicion. I seek to argue that the negotiation of a discourse that is medieval in origin unexpectedly enables queens to go beyond a solely intercessory influence and yet remain unthreatening.

Trying to create a clear division between late medieval and early modern representations of queenship is a futile exercise, I believe, because texts are always heavily imbued with influences outside their own synchronous moment of composition. So on one level this thesis is an extended case study in the inadequacy of claims for a clear divide between the medieval and the early modern and also for continuities of representation across these periods. My case studies highlight the ways in which ideals of queenship are constructed, supported and demolished *over time*. What I've tried to demonstrate is that extending the chronological consideration highlights unexpected patterns; regnant queenship does *not* actually have the permanent impact of valorising active queenship nor do representations of queenship steadily become more *modern*. On the contrary, in certain political and dynastic circumstances these representations revert to earlier modes as medieval forms of female influence are revived. In conclusion, therefore, my analysis will lead me to claim that we see in negotiations of queenship over a long period continuity as much as change.

## Chapter 1

### Malory's Guenevere: Questioning Intercessory Ideals of Queenship

Over the course of this thesis, I will show that literary representations of historical queens reveal an ongoing and fractious negotiation between intercessory and autonomous female power. A model of intercessory or intermediary influence, rather than direct political authority, enables queens to influence policy without undermining the authority and decisiveness of their husbands; it secures a given queen's power over her husband while also publicly inscribing her as subordinate, subject to his will. Whilst mediation is crucial to perceptions of successful queenship, at the same time fears about female influence are usually centred on the queen's unparalleled intimacy with the king, as I shall show. Her private influence over her husband can render her uncontrollable because advisors' political influence stops at the bedroom door. Commentators worry constantly about the queen's proximity to the king because in challenging his power she can render him impotent or even usurp his sovereignty; where queens take on a function of policing and upholding masculinity, this paradoxically brings the ideal of mediation or subordination into question.

We shall see that the practice of intercessory queenship keeps concerns about female power in balance, but sometimes situations arise that upset the balance. The shortcomings of the intercessory model are particularly clear in discourse depicting Margaret of Anjou and her controversial leadership of the Lancastrian party amidst the chaos of the Wars of the Roses. Margaret could not reconcile her performance with the submission and obedience advised by Christine de Pizan and other advice manuals for queens. Representations of Margaret of Anjou repeatedly accuse her of usurping the power of the king, and they do so by showing her breaching intercessory expectations. From the 1460s, there was no competent king with whom the queen *could* actually intervene; the problem of how to intercede with an incompetent or absent king whilst

underplaying her own political autonomy, is *the* central problem for Margaret in her career. In effect, we shall see that over time, allegations about Margaret's behaviour destabilise both her own public identity and that of the political system to which she belongs. I will ask whether we see in representations of Margaret a failure of intercessory norms or an enforced move into a form of active queenship which was effective, albeit controversial.

Most sources see Margaret's political and military interference as transgressive, but we shall see, too, that some do acknowledge the limitations of a more passive intercessory model. Here in chapter 1, I seek to argue that Malory subverts intercessory tropes by adapting his medieval Arthurian sources to show an effective and even militant queenship at work in *Morte Darthur*. Malory's Guenevere casts light on, even seeks approval for, Margaret of Anjou's active queenship; her treatment contains glimpses of sympathy for the troubled queen and for her newly autonomous, even military, style of queenship. I think we might read Malory's representation of Arthur's queen, Guenevere, as a defence of Margaret but also, crucially, as a defence of a proactive queenly influence that challenges traditional expectations for subservient, intercessory queenship. I will demonstrate that the *Morte* initiates a vision of autonomous queenship as necessary for the stability of the realm; an active, even military, role for a queen is seen as serving national, rather than personal, interests. I shall argue that his more ambiguous portrayal of queenship would have been likely to meet with sympathy amongst Malory's contemporary readers given the vacuum caused by Henry VI's incompetent performance on the throne.

When we talk of Malory's new version, we must be cognizant of the troubled textual history of the *Morte Darthur*. William Caxton's printed edition, published on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1485, was organised into chapters, signposted by new chapter introductions and a list of the subject matter of each as well as a new Preface and Table of Contents. The assumption that this structure was Malory's remained unquestioned until 1934 when the chance find of a manuscript version in a vault in Winchester College enabled us to see clearly for the first time Caxton's actions as editor. The



discovery of the Winchester manuscript made it possible to see the differences that Caxton had made to his printed text and offers rare clues about approaches to editing in the late medieval period.

The Winchester manuscript has a very different narrative structure to the one imposed by Caxton; for instance, in her essay, “‘The Hoole Book’: Editing and the Creation of Meaning in Malory’s Text’, Carol Meale persuasively argues that the manuscript ‘shifts narrative emphasis onto Lancelot’s role as knight, rather than lover’.<sup>1</sup> It contains no chapter headings (although there is some visual signposting as breaks in the text are marked by switches to red ink in several places, or else by the use of a different script) whilst, by contrast, Caxton set out to make his text more accessible to the reader, and he more actively engaged in a broader contemporary debate (which we see in the historiography of the period – Polydore Vergil’s *Historia Anglica*, for instance) about the historicity of Arthur.

The relationship of manuscript to printed text remains open to debate. Eugene Vinaver, the first editor of the Winchester manuscript, questioned the narrative unity of the manuscript, arguing instead that it was conceived as a series of separate books. His published version was called simply ‘Works’ in a nod to its disparate nature; he saw the combined work as a publisher’s construction. Other critics such as Derek Brewer and R.M. Lumiansky have argued that there are, in fact, thematic continuities between its constituent books which link the whole.<sup>2</sup> Caxton’s *Morte* was immediately reprinted five times which points to a sustained audience and wide readership (it was re-printed in 1498 by Caxton’s successor, Wynken de Worde, in 1529 and again in 1559 with illustrations). The broad base of distribution of Caxton’s printed version shows its wide appeal to a book buying public but it is obviously harder to see the cultural or literary context of the manuscript version. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Meale, “‘The Hoole Book’: Editing and the Creation of Meaning in Malory’s Text’, in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 3-17 (p. 16)

<sup>2</sup> Derek Brewer, “‘the hoole book’”, in *Essays on Malory*, ed. by J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 41-63; R. M. Lumiansky (ed.), *Malory’s Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964).

thesis I have taken the Winchester manuscript as an original source without Caxton's subsequent interpolations, but at the same time I must acknowledge that textual questions remain – there is no way of knowing whether the Winchester manuscript is any closer to his original version than is Caxton's.

My first key question is the extent to which we might read into Malory's queen echoes of the highly-stylised depictions of the transgressive queen Margaret, the 'she-wolf'. That does not necessarily imply that we should see *Morte Darthur* as *directly* allegorical. Certainly, it does not contain a systematic scheme of references to contemporary politics and the suggestion that Malory explicitly set out to create a direct portrait of Margaret ignores the existence of his source materials. Nevertheless, several critics attribute to the *Morte* a generalised political commentary on its period of composition and I shall show later that his changes to his sources often accentuate parallels with contemporary politics. The most comprehensive recent effort to link Malory's work directly with his contemporary environment is P. J. C. Field's political biography, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*. Field traces the vicissitudes of Malory's life and various imprisonments, and half-heartedly concludes that Malory supported the Lancastrian cause at least by the end of his life.<sup>3</sup> It is not a straightforward issue, however, in the context of constantly changing political loyalties and not much can be known for sure of Malory's affinity. He began his early career in service to Henry Beauchamp, Duke of Warwick, and was paid a substantial annuity by him until around 1446. At some point, however, he was also in the service of the powerful Duke of Buckingham, rival to Warwick, although in 1450 he was prosecuted for taking part in a murderous ambush against Buckingham, so he had clearly fallen out with him by that date. Malory also seems to have allied himself with the Duke of York by the mid 1450s, possibly out of loyalty to Richard Neville, the new Duke of Warwick, or possibly simply as a result of his enmity with Buckingham.<sup>4</sup> The thing that *is* clear, is that Malory's

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<sup>3</sup> P. J. C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Times*, p. 128.

affinity changed several times over the course of his life – which perhaps explains the obsessive search for good lordship we see reflected throughout the narrative of *Morte Darthur*.

Vinaver argues that Malory's Arthur represents a version of King Henry VI.<sup>5</sup> His theory accounts for the obvious frailty of King Arthur in the later parts of the *Morte*. The king's effectiveness certainly diminishes over the course of *Morte*, and by Book 8 he is weak and insecure. Mellyagant and Aggravayne both condemn their queen on behalf of the cuckolded king; Aggravayne will justify his treacherous behaviour – revealing Guenevere's adultery – by arguing that 'hit ys shamefully suffird of us all that we shulde suffir so noble a kynge as kynge Arthur ys to be shamed' (8.673). Here Aggravayne draws attention to the passivity of the aggrieved king; action is done *to* him, not *by* him. Historiographical texts of the period emphasise king Henry's shame in similar terms by focussing on his passivity, for instance, Francesco Coppini, Bishop of Terni and legate sent by Pope Pius II to England in 1459, reports how the Earl of Warwick described the King as 'a dolt and a fool' whose power 'lay in the hands of his wife and those who defile the king's chamber'.<sup>6</sup>

Field's influential analysis in *Malory: Texts and Sources* suggests that that Arthur is more accurately seen as a generalised depiction of English kingship than as direct historical allegory.<sup>7</sup> In part, that is because the youthful Arthur might equally be identified with the youthful Edward IV or with Henry VI. Richard R. Griffiths has argued that Malory's portrayal of king Arthur 'is a composite allegory of the three Lancastrian kings, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI, respectively'.<sup>8</sup> He suggests that the early books of *Morte Darthur* show a strong but troubled Henry IV, a good king ruling a discordant nation; the middle section with its Grail Quest and martial glories represents the glorious successes of Henry V, whilst the final section reflects the disintegration and anarchy of Henry VI's court. In other words, three separate kings, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI, each represent a

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene Vinaver, *The Works of Thomas Malory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 3 Vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Vol I, p. xxxi.

<sup>6</sup> *The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. by F.A. Gragg, Book 3 (Northampton, MA: Smith College Studies in History, 1939-40), pp. 269-70.

<sup>7</sup> P. J. C. Field, *Malory: Texts and Sources* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Richard R. Griffiths, 'The Political Bias of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Viator* 5 (1974), 365-86 (p. 366).

distinct phase of Arthur's legend: his youthful accession, his glorious reign and multiple conquests, and finally his tragic decline.

Parallels have also been noted between Guenevere and Margaret, albeit in a limited way. Nellie Slaton Aurner suggested back in 1938, for example, that 'the character of Guenevere, in its main features, parallels that of Margaret of Anjou as preserved in the chronicles'.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Ann Astell has suggested that the portrayal of Queen Guenevere varies greatly across the books of *Morte Darthur* because Malory deliberately intended to portray two different queens; Edward IV's wife Elizabeth Woodville *and* Margaret of Anjou.<sup>10</sup> According to Astell, Arthur's wooing of Guenevere in Book 1 recalls Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville in 1464 and his condemnation of Guenevere in the later books reflects Malory's enmity towards Margaret. But Astell's argument is undermined, I think, by her presumption that Guenevere at the end of *Morte Darthur* is an unsympathetic character; in fact I will prove that Malory goes to great lengths to create a more effective and more active queen than he found in his sources. He deliberately avoids the 'loathed queen' depiction that is so often found in contemporary references to Margaret.

In *Malory: Texts and Sources*, P.J.C. Field describes how the final sections of Malory's *Morte Darthur* are 'a conflation of the latter part of two romances', the *Vulgate Cycle* and the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*.<sup>11</sup> The anonymous Vulgate Cycle was completed in French in the early thirteenth century and its *Mort Artu* section contains the earliest full depiction of Lancelot's adventures and also the destructive nature of his ties to Guenevere. R. Howard Bloch writes, 'for a novel which begins in earthly splendour and spiritual plenitude the *Mort Artu* ends in a curious spectacle of chaos and decline'.<sup>12</sup> Karen Pratt has shown that Bloch overstates the distinctions between *Mort Artu* and

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<sup>9</sup> Nellie Slaton Aurner, *Malory: An Introduction to the Morte Darthur* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson, 1938), p. xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Ann W. Astell, *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 149.

<sup>11</sup> P. J. C. Field, *Malory: Texts and Sources*, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> R. Howard Bloch, 'From Grail Quest to Inquest: The Death of King Arthur', *The Modern Language Review*, 69, No. 1 (Jan, 1974), 40-55 (p. 40).

*Morte Darthur* but, even so, the changes Malory makes, particularly to the ending of his work, substantially moderate the latter's vision of despair and decay.<sup>13</sup> The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* is an anonymous Middle English poem written in the fourteenth century which concentrates in particular on the tragic outcome of the Guenevere, Lancelot and Arthur relationship.

I will demonstrate in this chapter that Malory's Guenevere is more dignified and noble than those earlier manifestations. She is not consistently characterised as difficult or changeable, although neither is she mythologised. *Mort Artu*, *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and *Morte Darthur* are all punctuated by three significant dramatic events involving the queen: the episode of the Poisoned Apple, the story of the Maid of Astolat, and the kidnapping of Guenevere by Mellyagant, yet their treatments of these stories are very different. In the *Stanzaic Morte*, Guenevere's autonomy, her agency, is famously destructive and divisive – her adulterous relationship with Lancelot is the direct cause of the fracture of Arthur's glorious fellowship – but it also yields penitence and spiritual redemption not only for Guenevere, but also for Lancelot, who becomes Malory's great hero, too. By choosing to follow the *Stanzaic Morte Darthur* more closely than the Vulgate, Malory deliberately annexes an English Arthurian tradition far kinder and more sympathetic in its treatment of Arthur and his queen than its continental counterpart, making significant efforts to rehabilitate her. In *Morte Darthur*, unlike the *Mort Artu*, Guenevere has an heroic end. I will go into these parallels in more detail later when I consider the texts alongside one another; Malory's changes have a subtle but distinct impact on the reader's understanding of Guenevere's character and her situation.

The Guenevere of the *Stanzaic Morte* had acquired unexpected contemporary resonance by the time Malory set out to re-work the tale, and into Malory's queen might be imaginatively read the voice of Margaret, a queen silenced by the condemnation of a biased and hostile audience. A contemporary audience would certainly have recognised several political parallels in Malory's work. Contemporary readers of Guenevere's story, for example, would see parallels between Margaret's

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Pratt, *La Mort de la roi Artu* (London: Grant and Cutler, 2004), pp. 72-73.

knights, who were all killed in at Blore Heath, and the 'queen's gallants' in Book 8 of *Morte Darthur*; both queens are newly vulnerable and in need of defenders.<sup>14</sup> Both are militarily active, isolated, dependent on core allegiances but ultimately maintainers of chivalric virtue. I warned in my introduction that we must be careful about applying fixed allegorical meanings to texts which are not able to support them. Reading *Morte Darthur* purely as *roman à clef* fails to acknowledge that it represents just one moment in a long continuum of Arthurian origin myths. But what I think we *can* do is to use the text's 'historicity' to suggest areas of common experience; by identifying changes to his source material, I will highlight glimpses of a distinctly Malorian political consciousness in *Morte Darthur*. These glimpses manifest themselves primarily in terms of the representation of the queen. The examples I will discuss illustrate Strohm's methodological argument – considered in my introduction – that a fictional narrative can legitimately borrow concerns, dramas and crises from real historic events; they show how fictional and historic discourses can provide echoes and explanations of each other.<sup>15</sup>

In section I, I will consider the wider context for Malory's re-consideration of queenship, in particular focussing on the extent to which intercession or mediation is inscribed in cultural expectations of queens. In section II I will look at textual patterns which occur in depictions of Margaret as I seek to understand the extent to which she sought to use intercessory tropes to validate her own queenship. We shall see how, and why, she failed in that aim. Finally, in section III I will demonstrate in what ways the *Morte* offers a response to the hostile treatments of Margaret; I will argue that *Morte Darthur* explicitly engages with, and calls into question, those ideals of intercession against which Margaret is judged. By considering Malory's queen in the context of what we have seen of historiographical treatments of Margaret, it will become clear that Guenevere's militancy and autonomy offer responsible, temperate reactions to political and military upheaval. I

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<sup>14</sup> Field, *Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> 'Introduction', p. 15.

shall show, in short, that Malory's queen goes from a peacemaking to a politically active function *without* becoming unnatural or subversive.

## I Intercessory Ideals: Submission, Mediation *and* Resistance

Portrayals of Margaret reflect an ongoing debate about both her capacity and her desire to influence her husband, a debate which I will trace briefly here. Before we can draw any firm conclusions about Margaret and Guenevere and the extent to which they use or subvert ideals of intercessory queenship, we must consider in more detail various texts which reveal contemporaneous assumptions about appropriate queenly behaviour. Because the queen's political influence is solely based on her relationship with the king, intercession allows the king to change his judgement and yet look merciful rather than weak and too-easily influenced. The use of subordination to effect political change is commonly described by analogy to Griselda and Esther in the period – these women are prime exemplars of agency through mediation and subjugation. Both Griselda and Esther will reappear later in this thesis. In chapter 3, for example, we shall see Griselda used as a proxy for Katherine of Aragon because she proclaims her subservience to her powerful husband even whilst she influences his judgement; William Forrest's *The History of Grisild* shows a combination of wifely and queenly duties as a necessary part of the public performance of queenship.<sup>16</sup>

Several modern discussions of queenship focus on the intercession convention, most notably John C. Parsons in *Medieval Queenship*.<sup>17</sup> Parsons describes queens as traversing the 'cloudy limits between unofficial and official, margin and centre, "private" and "public"'.<sup>18</sup> Paul Strohm sees intercession, by contrast, as confining; it does not in fact represent an alternative source of power,

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<sup>16</sup> *The History of Grisild the Second*, ed. by W. D. Mackay (Oxford: Chiswick Press, 1875). All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>17</sup> 'Family, Sex and Power: the Rhythms of Medieval Queenship', in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. by John C. Parsons (Toronto: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), pp. 1-13.

<sup>18</sup> John C. Parsons, *The Court and Household of Eleanor of Castile in 1290* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977), p. 249.

but instead 'intercessory queenship [...] would seem more likely to dupe women than to empower them, more likely to accommodate itself to later medieval ideas of theocratic and patriarchal kingship than to seek their overthrow'.<sup>19</sup> I think Strohm understates the potential for intercession to become re-inscribed as resistance and even strength. In this thesis I shall show that there is a fine line between militant and intercessory influence; in some cases, intercessory power can be as threatening or as obstructive as militant queenship.

In 'Queens as Intercessors' in *Hochon's Arrow*, Paul Strohm explores the practical effectiveness of the intercessory model of queenship. He uses the example of Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III. In Froissart's account, Edward demanded the death of representatives of Calais who had refused to surrender to his army. Froissart tells us that 'adonc fist grant humelité la noble roine d'Engleterre, qui estoit durement enchainée et poloroit si tendrement de pitié que on ne le pooit soustenir. La vaillans et bonne dame se jetta en genouls par devant le roi son signour'.<sup>20</sup> Froissart claims that her action softened his heart, 'se li amolia li coers' and he therefore granted her wish. Her intercession here is based on vulnerability; Philippa's pregnant state publicly inscribes her domestic role and by kneeling the queen subordinates herself physically. By publicly inscribing her vulnerability, she secures concessions from her mollified husband. Moreover, the king's re-consideration of his position is here seen as a sign of his strength, not weakness. Another example is seen in the *Westminster Chronicle* which depicts Anne of Bohemia repeatedly prostrating herself at her husband king Richard II's feet; she pleads on behalf of the people of London after Richard withdrew their privileges and levied a huge fine.<sup>21</sup> Anne's restraining influence over her husband is as clear as is her dependency on him.

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<sup>19</sup> Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Froissart, 'Oeuvres', Vol 5, ed. by Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels: Devaux, 1868), p. 215. Translated by Strohm in *Hochon's Arrow*: 'The noble queen of England, who was extremely pregnant, humbled herself and besought his pity so tenderly that she could not be withstood. The valiant and good woman threw herself on her knees before the king her lord', p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 107.



Margaret of Anjou's own letter to her uncle Charles, Duke of Anjou, dated December 1446, makes a claim for feminine mediation as well as ritualised deference and indirect influence in very similar terms to those we have seen above. She writes,

En tant [...] que nous priez et exhortez a perserverament tenir la main pardevers mon tresredoubte Seigneur que de sa part il soit tousiours enclin au bien del a paix, vous plaise savoir pour verite que adez nous ysommes emploiee et emploirons du bon cuer si avant quil nous sera possible.

In as much [...] as you ask and urge us perseveringly to extend the hand to my dread lord that on his part he be always inclined to the good of the peace, may it please you to know in truth that we are employing and will employ ourselves with a good heart so far as will be possible for us.<sup>22</sup>

Here Margaret chooses to represent herself as an effective and committed intermediary with the king. Her words acknowledge her political responsibility in intercessory terms; she tries to exercise – or *look* like she's exercising – a traditional intercessory approach to the exercise of power. She emphasises her subordination, stretching out her hand in a begging posture as she seeks to influence her 'dread lord'. We might legitimately question whether her words are an accurate description of her attitudes to her queenship; nevertheless they conform to expectations for intercession by acknowledging her private, personal influence over him.

The intercessory trope assumes that queens support the workings of their sovereign/husband; in so doing they validate and extend the king's authority over both his queen and his kingdom. Joan Kelly-Gadol has argued in her essay 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' that the expectation that power be exercised through their husbands forces women into a personal or

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<sup>22</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Français 4054, fol. 94. Quoted and translated by Maurer in *Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power*, p. 36.

private realm and therefore that their public political function is purely symbolic.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the queen is a public symbol of male power. If the queen is a symbol of the king's authority, then her household reflects her husband's kingship, becoming a central part of the political community and communication of the court, integral to its character and its success. A proliferation of advice manuals for women in the medieval period share an insistence that a queen be *publicly* seen as inspiration for good deeds, charity and feats of chivalry in order to support and underline the sovereignty and authority of her husband. For example, an anonymous manual printed in the fifteenth century (itself a translation of a French tract of 1347) insists that the queen's duties are public and also subordinate. It urges her to have:

good and due regarde to such thinge as toucheth the profyte and the honoure of hir lorde and hir self. And she shulde take in hande noo great meters with oute licence or cogie of hir lord, anents whan at all tymes she oweth to bere reverence and oneure.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear here that a good wife bears responsibility for national as well as domestic harmony. We shall see later that hostile representations of Margaret adhere precisely to these terms when they look for evidence of her deviant behaviour.

There are many other examples of a focus on the wife's private influence over her husband. Geoffroi de La Tour Landry composed *Le Livre du Chevalier de La Tour Landry* for his daughters in 1371-72. Later translated into English by William Caxton as *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, it, too, emphasises the importance of the public and personal responsibilities of women by listing a series of prescribed behaviours, he tells us, for instance, 'no gentyl wymmen ought to make none effrayes in them but ought to haue gentyle hertes and softe answers ... lyke as dyde the yonger

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<sup>23</sup> Joan Kelly-Gadol, 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. by Renate Bridenthal and Susan M. Stuard (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), pp. 175-203.

<sup>24</sup> Cited and translated by Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 3.

doughter of Aaragon, whiche for hir humylylte and curtosye conquerd to be quene of spayne'.<sup>25</sup>

Philippe de Mézières, soldier, crusader, royal advisor and man of letters who lived between 1327

and c. 1405, wrote his *Le livre de le vertu du sacrement de mariage* in the late fourteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

This work comprises stories about good wives that illustrate the virtues fundamental to private and public harmony. Philippe sees female virtue as necessary to the smooth running of the household.

His work uses the familiar figure of Patient Griselda to epitomise idealised female virtue; because she mediates disputes and subordinates her will to her husband's, therefore she is both the perfect political subject and the perfect wife. The story of Griselda exemplifies how the queen can exert a restraining influence over the king and yet maintain a subordinate position.

For more evidence about the expectations of good queenship in the late medieval period, we might turn to Caxton's *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* published in 1475, which was intended as a manual for queens. In it, Caxton claims that

a Quene ought to be chaste, wyse, of honest peple well manerd and not curious in  
nourisshynge of her children her wysedom ought not only tappere in feet and werkes but  
also in spekyng that is to wete that she be secrete and telle not suche thynges as oughte to  
be holden secrete .... A Quene oughte to be well mannered and amonge all she oughte to be  
tymerous and shamefast.<sup>27</sup>

We can identify here a clear focus on wisdom and honesty, as well as a plea that a queen be discreet in her speech. Caxton emphasises the need for her influence and opinion to be applied with humility and secrecy; they must both must be *privately* applied. Again, this ideal recurs in coverage of Margaret; the terms of criticism of her tend to focus, as I shall show in section II, on her failure to be circumspect, to proclaim her influence publicly as subject to the king's authorisation.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, ed. by M. Y. Offord, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Le livre de le vertu du sacrement de mariage* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), p. 356.

<sup>27</sup> William Caxton, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, ed. by Jenny Adams (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), p. 35.

Christine de Pizan's famous advice manuals for women are equally important in revealing how women's virtue connects the domestic and the public spheres. Completed in 1405, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* is intended to educate women of all estates. It specifically lists peaceful mediation, intercession and advocacy as female *and* queenly virtues; Christine too, places her emphasis on the queen's intimacy with the king and her private influence over him. Christine argues that 'men are by nature more courageous and more hot-headed .... Women are by nature more timid and of sweeter disposition, and for this reason ... they can be the best means of pacifying men'.<sup>28</sup> The intimacy on which her power is based must be balanced with the formality of her public role. Christine devotes a section of her earlier work, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, to offering advice to 'the good and wise princess' who, she argues, 'will make every effort to restore peace between the barons if there is any discord'.<sup>29</sup> Here, too, it is clear that the princess has to connect domestic virtue with public influence.

These sources above all concur in their insistence that whilst a queen's opinion must be privately applied, her goodness, charity, mercy and other feminine attributes must be publicly visible if they are to substantiate her husband's kingship. The paradox of intercessory queenship is that it vests its power publicly but it does so via dependency or subordination. All the examples above show keen awareness of the threat that a woman might directly insert herself into affairs of state and the (male) networks that sustain political power. In times of crisis and suspicion, a queen's position on the peripheries of power can leave her exposed to recurring allegations about her behaviour that are never entirely disprovable because they relate to private, and therefore invisible, behaviour. As Helen Maurer declares with respect to Margaret, 'the permeability of the boundary between public and private spheres ... left her at permanent risk of being perceived as a

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<sup>28</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, trans. and ed. by Sarah Lawson (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. and ed. by Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 50.

transgressor'.<sup>30</sup> Margaret's career was dogged by rumours about sexual transgression and, similarly, the private existence of the queen is seen as seriously problematic in *Morte Darthur* because it contributes to one of its great controversies: the central adultery plot.

In *The Romance of Adultery* Peggy McCracken studies the links between the queen's body and the king's sovereignty; she sees the obsession with the chastity of the queen as directly related to concerns over the legitimacy of sovereign power.<sup>31</sup> McCracken argues that the queen's body represents a site on which to render the health and integrity of the king's political authority, and therefore attacks on the queen represent displaced attacks on the king and his relationship with his faction.<sup>32</sup> By extension, of course, if we agree that the integrity of the queen's body symbolises the integrity of the king's sovereignty, then the suggestion that the queen is disorderly or failing in her duty implies a deeper disorder in the kingdom. Furthermore, if the queen's chastity is critical to the health of the realm, the violation of her physical space represents a physical threat to her body but also a symbolic threat to the kingdom. Richard Grafton, a Tudor chronicler highly critical of Margaret, describes how the 'duke of Sommerset' was arrested in the 'Quene's great Chamber'; a superficially simple comment that shows the duke's extraordinary access to the queen, whilst at the same time hinting at inappropriateness – a Great Chamber is a public reception room, but there might also be a smutty pun intended.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas Walsingham, the most famous chronicler of the Peasants' Revolt and the civil unrest of the late fourteenth century, describes a confrontation between Joan of Kent, the queen mother, and the rebels in 1381. Walsingham reports:

Who would have believed that not just peasants but the lowest of them ... would have dared to force a way into the bedroom of the king or of his mother .... Several of them had gone on

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<sup>30</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queens and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1998), p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Grafton's Chronicle, or A History of England*, ed. by J. Johnson (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1908), p. 653.

their own into the various rooms, had the effrontery to sit and lie on the bed of the king joking merrily, with one or two even asking the king's mother for a kiss.<sup>34</sup>

In the medieval period, a queen's audiences with the king and with her petitioning subjects both take place in the private space of her bedchamber and the seat of her power is also the site of her influence over her husband. But Walsingham's narrative is suffused with images of violation; Joan is taken in her bed, an allusion to the intimate nature of the confrontation but also a means of emphasising the challenge posed to a person of great political importance. Mark Ormrod has suggested that the potentially sexual nature of the violation – asking for a kiss – is deliberately invoked to articulate the treasonous status of the crimes committed by the rebels.<sup>35</sup> The encounter with Joan described above is a gross offence against the king as well as the queen because, by taking advantage of the queen's physical vulnerability, the rebels also threaten the king's authority.

An attack on the queen's body represents an attack on the king and the nation he represents because the queen is a public symbol of the strength and power of the king. This is clear in *Morte Darthur* too; Guenevere herself understands and defends the relationship between the queen's body and the sovereign state. In the later books of the *Morte*, she resists separate efforts by Mellyagant and Mordred to take possession of her body natural. Lancelot as chivalric hero famously desires – and gains access to – the body of the queen, but Mellyagant and Mordred want the body of the queen because it represents political power. In the latter case, Mellyagant violates the privacy of the queen by bursting into her bedchamber without invitation and Lancelot chastises him in the following terms: 'ye ded nat youre parte not knyghtly, to touche a quenys bed whyle hit was drawyn and she lyyng therein. [...] [T]herefore, sir Mellyagaunce, ye have done unworshypfully and shamefully to youreselff' (7.658). He is particularly outraged at the attempted violation of her

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<sup>34</sup> *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, trans. by David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 125. See also *Froissart: Chronicles*, trans. by Geoffrey Brereton (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 220.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Ormrod, 'In Bed with Joan of Kent: The King's Mother and the Peasants' Revolt', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 277-93 (p. 278).

vulnerable body because, by being present in the chamber, Lancelot becomes a proxy for Arthur.

Malory describes how ‘pryvaly she called unto her a chylde of hir chambir which was swyfftely horsed of a grete avauntayge’ (7.652). In her forceful resistance to Mellyagant, Guenevere makes control of her body the key issue. If the body of the queen represents the realm, her defence of that realm renders her a brave and virtuous queen. In effect, here, Malory is presenting a portrait of a queen who defends her nation by force even whilst she remains feminine, virtuous and also dutiful.

Even if queens derive real power from an intermediary function, at the same time that power is usually limited. Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* offers a clear example, with its portrayal of Hippolyta as a marginalised, captive queen with limited political authority and only indirect intercessory power. The passage below shows how the famous warrior queen Hippolyta and her ladies literally prostrate themselves at Theseus’s feet to persuade him to take pity on the lovers Arcite and Palamon;

The queene anon, for verray wommanhede,

Gan for to wepe...

And on hir bare knees adoun they falle

And wolde have kist his feet ther as he stood;

Til at the laste aslaked was his mood,

For pitee renneth soone in gentil herte.<sup>36</sup>

In this passage the women intercede aggressively and Theseus succumbs to their pleas because of *his* gentleness; in other words, his nobility. So intercession paradoxically gives the queen a dominant voice even whilst it signposts her subordination and vulnerability. In chapter 4 I will argue that Shakespeare’s re-writing of this scene in his late collaboration *The Two Noble Kinsmen* – in which he

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<sup>36</sup> ‘The Knight’s Tale’, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry Benson, 3rd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 1748-1761. Subsequent references are to this edition by line number. For more on the depiction of Hippolyta as silenced and defeated, see Suzanne C. Hagedorn, *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 75-101.

reworks the materials of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – makes it clear that the three queens' intercession is actually a sign of resistance to Theseus's will.

There is an obvious tension inherent in the expectations of queens to be *both* authoritative *and* submissive; Christine de Pizan resolves it by portraying a queen who is 'as a king' in her regard for the welfare of her country and her ability to protect its best interests.<sup>37</sup> For Christine, although intercessory power is an important strand, it is not the only conventional queenly virtue; her *Book of the City of Ladies* argues that wisdom and counsel are also valid and complementary forms of queenship. But pro-active political leadership, even military activity, is acceptable too. In the example below Christine offers a clear defence of queenly regency:

The wise and noble Queen Blanche ... ruled the kingdom of France with such skill and care until her son was old enough to accede to the throne, that no man could have done better.

Even when he was grown up, she proved herself so worthy that she remained at the head of his advisors and nothing was decided without her consent. She even followed her son into battle. (31)

Christine goes on to describe how 'by using both force and gentleness, this lady succeeded in regaining the loyalty and obedience of her subjects and henceforth ruled Provence with such perfect fairness that no further murmurs or complaints were ever heard against her rule'.<sup>38</sup> According to Christine, clearly a queen can be virtuous, feminine *and* powerful in her own right, albeit as an adjunct to her son's rule. Christine attacks assumptions contained within the male-authored advice texts we saw earlier, that the only acceptable form of queenship is a subordinate one. Here, Blanche takes on a proactive and effective political role; she is the chief advisor to the king. Moreover she is *more* effective than the men of the court and *more* loyal by dint of her blood relationship to the king. In the next section I shall show how there are several depictions of Margaret which appear,

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<sup>37</sup> I will discuss in chapter 4 commentaries that depict Elizabeth I as mother *and* father of a nation, a combination which reconciles in the figure of the sovereign the female virtues of chastity and humility with male visions of strength and protectiveness.

<sup>38</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, p. 32.



Christine-like, to admire, or at the very least, accept, her 'manlier' qualities such as military expertise and political competence.

I have explained how the liminal space which the queen inhabits between king and court and her need to navigate between geographical, personal and political boundaries both enables intercession-based queenship and actively threatens it. If a woman's public performance is intended to pronounce and sustain her husband's sovereignty, as we have seen, at the same time it makes her particularly threatening by giving her power beyond the purely symbolic. In the rest of this chapter it will become clear that Margaret and Guenevere expose in very similar ways the problems inherent in an intercessory model of queenship. Both queens stand accused of breaching their socially sanctioned public role, most obviously through their private sexual transgression and in both cases the navigation of the woman's public role as queen and her personal duties as wife is problematic, associated with tension and instability. The ultimate concern, of course, is that a less benign queen, or a less honourable one, usurps power in her own, rather than her country's, interest. In section II, I set out to explore how expectations for intercessory queenship as well as problems inherent within it are clear in the controversy over Margaret of Anjou's 'leadership' of the Lancastrian campaign.

## **II        The Problem of Margaret of Anjou**

So is it, then, a question simply of personality and popularity that separates a usurper from a protector? Notwithstanding the mental and physical incapacity of her husband Henry VI, Margaret is accused by commentators of usurping the power and prerogative of the king. Debate continues even to the present day over whether her political actions concealed a desire for power and autonomy in her own right, whether she 'masked her power by invoking male authority while representing herself as intermediary', as Helen Maurer claims in her biography, or whether she simply saw herself

acting as a proxy for the king.<sup>39</sup> The contemporaneous sources which describe Margaret are deeply affected by the instability of the times in which they were written, and influential accounts written in the following century reflect a heavily pro-Tudor bias.<sup>40</sup> Manifestos, political poems and ballads all bear clear signs of Yorkist propaganda. A chronicle by John Hardyng renders this textual conflict very clearly; it exists in two versions because it was specifically re-written after the Yorkist victory at Towton in March 1461 in order to compliment the Duke of York and his son the Earl of March, soon-to-be King Edward IV.<sup>41</sup> Most sources understate Lancastrian military successes because they seek to diminish Margaret's competence or effectiveness. In addition to the obvious problem of partisanship, modern historians and critics are faced with the difficulty of differentiating attacks on Margaret personally from accusations which came about because she violated generic expectations about the appropriate behaviour of queens; Henry VI had a mental illness which meant that he spent much of the 1460s completely unresponsive and, since Margaret could not intercede with an absent king, she had to find another path to influence that did not involve her husband in anything more than name. Here in section II, I will demonstrate that the real controversy over Margaret comes about from her refusal, or inability, to conform to an intercessory model of female influence.

Margaret was the major decision-maker on the Lancastrian side, exercising power deliberately and definitively, notwithstanding her *claims* to the contrary. In her biography *Margaret of Anjou*, Helen Maurer argues that 'in a world that largely denied female authority and assumed female subordination, she [i.e. Margaret] had to rely on informal channels of influence'.<sup>42</sup> Maurer sees Margaret's efforts to take control of her husband's military campaigns and council as inevitable consequences of the weakness of the king rather than demonstrations of independent will. Most

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<sup>39</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> Most notably, Polydore Vergil, writing specifically for Henry Tudor, engrained in his *Anglica Historia* a vision of an anarchic and leaderless England saved by Tudor ascension to the crown.

<sup>41</sup> See Patricia-Ann Lee for a fuller discussion of the editorial history of Hardyng's Chronicle, in 'Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship', *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, 2 (Summer, 1986), 183-217 (p. 201).

<sup>42</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, p. 210.

modern historians agree that Margaret's power depended on male authorisation and that she displayed little evidence of desire to wield power of her own. Like Maurer, Joanna Laynesmith in *The Last Medieval Queens* questions the extent to which Margaret deliberately annexed male power to retain the crown for herself (or her own family).<sup>43</sup> Maurer and Laynesmith assume that Margaret became an accidental figurehead for the Lancastrians by virtue of the king's mental – and therefore his political – absence; they argue that Margaret made no explicit claim to leadership in her own right and that even her attempt to take over the regency in the wake of Henry's mental collapse was a response to tension rather than a cause of it.<sup>44</sup> They exonerate Margaret not by claiming that she was an effective and responsible leader stepping into a power vacuum, but by arguing that she had no interest in exercising real power and that she confirms a model of intercessory queenship wherein a good queen is expected to show no personal ambition or political inclination of her own. However, these historians fail to take sufficient account of the fact that Margaret's public acknowledgement of the need to act as an intermediary and as subservient does not necessarily mean that she *actually* intended to do so; in other words, they forget that *citing* a position of subservience is not the same as performing subservience.

In effect, Margaret began to exercise autonomous power over the course of the late 1440s and early 50s but, crucially, she continued to couch it in traditional intercessory terms. We know that Christine de Pizan's and other manuals of queenship endorse the queen's role as mediator as a means of preserving peace. Margaret's own letters, which date from the late 1440s, conform to Christine's 'appropriate spheres' of activity for a queen. They relate to the dispensation of protection to women and dependents, offering guidance and fair judgement. For example, her letter to the Duke of Somerset begs for a favour for a dependent and appeals to the Duke's honour and loyalty to carry out her wishes:

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<sup>43</sup> Laynesmith argues, 'rather than interpreting Margaret's bill [proclaiming herself regent] as evidence of her ambition for power, it could more fairly be seen as an attempt to provide an alternative to civil war', p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, p. 100.

Praying that ... ye will atte reverence of us have hir towards you especially recommended, helping, furthering, and supporting hir, with all th'ease, faver, and tendernesse that ye goodly may by right and trouth, demening hir in such wise, that she may have cause to reporte unto us of your good disposicion towards hir at this tyme.<sup>45</sup>

In her letters from this period, Margaret makes efforts to extend her protection to her servants; she awards compensation and dispenses charity and personal favours, as well as arranging suitable marriages and appointments to office. She acts to protect women, particularly vulnerable women. She writes to the Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, on behalf of an unprotected widow; 'lating you wite that, at oure insistence and request, my most doubted lord hath now late granted unto a poore widowe, Alice Marwarth, certain pardon' (CXXX, 160). Her reference to 'oure insistence and request' draws attention to her own intermediary role in effecting the pardon.

Margaret's position and authority were weakened from the start due to heavy concessions that Henry had made to secure his bride. She brought with her only 20,000 francs and her mother's empty claim to Mallorca, and at her marriage, Margaret renounced all her father's possessions: Jerusalem, Sicily, Provence. Henry gained a truce that lasted just twenty-one months.<sup>46</sup> Criticised for the lack of influence in her family connections, Margaret was at the same time suspected of having ulterior motives in respect of her relationship with her uncle, King Charles VII of France. In short, the marriage neither brought unity, nor did it enable England to avoid significant territorial losses. Margaret's financial and political 'value' to the nation was limited by the lack of wealth of her family and as the truce with Burgundy failed and the English king began to lose his overseas territories, suspicions grew that she nursed divided political loyalties and her unpopularity increased.

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<sup>45</sup> *Letters of Margaret of Anjou & Bishop Beckett and Others*, ed. by Cecil Monro, Camden Society No. 86 (London: John Bower Nichols and Sons, 1863), Letter LXXXII, p. 115. All subsequent references to this edition.

<sup>46</sup> Bertram Wolffe details the political agreement and its consequence for King Henry in *Henry VI* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 176.

The marriage marked the beginning of Henry's political failures. It was unpopular in particular because of his agreement to hand over the territory of Maine to the King of France; Henry had made a personal promise that he would hand over the territory in December 1445 with a final date for surrender on 1 November 1447. In May 1446, Margaret wrote to the French King to tell him that she would be present at the meeting between Henry and Charles to discuss the matter.<sup>47</sup> Margaret's involvement was particularly criticised and as rumours of Margaret's involvement spread, rebellious subjects withheld Maine entirely. It was only aggressive military preparations by Charles that led Henry to capitulate and a formal treaty to hand over the territory was signed on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1448.<sup>48</sup> Henry acknowledged that in handing over these provinces to France, he had acted at the request of his queen and that she had 'requested us to do this many times'.<sup>49</sup>

It is unsurprising that those parties most obviously involved were popularly blamed. The *English Chronicle* covering the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI was quick to attribute the loss of territories to Margaret's influence, which, it claimed, was treasonous because it reflected a deliberate political intervention *against* England; 'the duke of Suffolk ... hadde maad delyveraunce of Aunge and Mayn withoute assent of this lond unto the kyng of Cicile the quenes fader; and hadde also aliened and sold the duchie of Normandie to the king of Fraunce'.<sup>50</sup> In his biography of Henry VI, Bertram Wolffe suggests that Margaret played a key role in sustaining Henry's resolve to continue with his unpopular and disastrous French policy, that she provided active support although not quite active decision-making.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, Margaret herself always claimed that Henry was the decision-maker and that she played a supporting role only, on behalf of Charles VII and her father the Duke of Anjou. In her letter to Charles about the handover of Maine

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Stephenson (ed.), *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France During the Reign of Henry the Sixth, King of England* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1861), Vol I, p. 183.

<sup>48</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 199.

<sup>49</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Vol II, ii, p. 640.

<sup>50</sup> *English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI*, ed. by William Marx (London: Boydell, 2003), p. 70, lines 20-25.

<sup>51</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 183.

written in 1453, she presents herself as mediator and intercessor, lobbying her husband on behalf of her uncle:

no greater pleasure can we have in this world than to see an arrangement for a final peace between him and you ... and herein, to the pleasure of oure Lord, we will, upon our part, stretch forth the hand, and will employ ourselves herein effectually to our power in such wise that reason would that you, and all others, ought herein to be ratified.<sup>52</sup>

Despite her efforts, Margaret's influence was blamed for the loss of English positions in France. Even more seriously, her influence became associated with the weakness of the government and ensuing lawlessness in England; this is clear from the passage below from the *Brut Chronicle*:

For marriage of quene Margaret, what losse hath the reame of england had, bi losyng of Normandy and guyan, bi diuison of the reame, the rebelling of commines Ageynest ther princes and lordes; what division ayen ye lords, what murder and sleying of thame!<sup>53</sup>

Over the course of the 1450s, as the king's illness created a power vacuum, there is increasing evidence of Margaret's intervention in public politics; Lancastrian forces began to be depicted as 'the queen's army' and general pardons for rebel John Cade's men were offered 'at the request of the queen' – the king supposedly influenced by her 'most humble and persistent supplications, prayers and requests' for clemency for the rebels.<sup>54</sup>

The authors of the *English Chronicle* in 1459 portray an England 'out of all governance', under a king who was 'simple and led by covetous counsel' and a queen who 'with such as were of

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<sup>52</sup> Letters and Papers, II, ii, p. 165.

<sup>53</sup> *Brut*, Part I, p. 512.

<sup>54</sup> *John Benet's Chronicle* and *Gregory's Chronicle* refer to them as her gallants, as does the *English Chronicle*. See G. L. Harriss and M. A. Harriss, eds, 'John Benet's Chronicle for the Years 1400 to 1462', *Camden Miscellany* 24, Camden Society, fourth series IX (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd, 1972), pp. 151-233 (p. 224); 'Gregory's Chronicle' in *Historical Collections of a Citizen of London*, ed. by J. Gairdner (London: Camden Society, 1876), pp. 57-239 (p. 204); *English Chronicle*, pp. 79-80; *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), Vol V, p. 471.

her affynyte rewled the reame as her liked'.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Gascoigne, a historian roughly contemporary with Malory, describes how 'almost all the affairs of the realm were conducted according to the queen's will, by fair means or foul, as was said by several people. What will be the result of this, God knows'.<sup>56</sup> Margaret of Anjou's allies are referred to as a 'wykked affinitie', from which we may conclude though that Margaret's destructive use of power is 'wykked', not her power per se.<sup>57</sup> I have made the point that we must always acknowledge partisanship in contemporaneous chronicles, many of which attacked Margaret because they were uncomfortable directly attacking their king. It is fair to assume that Margaret's influence was exaggerated by hostile sources. Even so, it is clear from the array of sources that she was an important member, if not *the* leader, of the Lancastrians by the late 1450s.

It was not only allegations that she exerted influence on behalf of herself and her family that caused Margaret to become increasingly politically isolated. Sensitivity to the issue of dynastic succession had been heightened by the deaths of regents Bedford and Gloucester and by Henry VI's minority, and the concern became more pressing as a result of Margaret's failure to produce an heir for eight years. Stability of rule depends, of course, on the production of heirs and Margaret's failure to bear a child in the 1440s manifested itself in anxiety and innuendo; she became tied up with what Pauline Stafford has called 'succession politics' – in other words, the linking of dynastic success with political power.<sup>58</sup> In 1448 a felon held in Canterbury gaol accused his neighbour of complaining: 'oure quene was none abyll to be quene of inglond, but and he were a pere of or a lord of this realm ... he would be on of thaym that schuld helpe to putte her a doun, for because that sche bereth no

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<sup>55</sup> *English Chronicle*, p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> *Loci et Libro Veritatum*, ed. by J.E.T. Rogers (London: Clarendon, 1881), p. vi.

<sup>57</sup> 'A Political Retrospect', in *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III*, ed. by Thomas Wright (London: Longman, 1861), Volume 2, 268-69.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries', in *Medieval Queenship*, pp. 143-67 (p. 146).

child, and because that we have no prynces in this land'.<sup>59</sup> Even if this allegation is untrue, it suggests that expressions of dynastic concerns are common to all levels of society. We see clearly expressed here the popular expectation for a queen to provide a clear succession, and the assumption that queens who fail in that duty fail to fulfil in their primary function and, theoretically at least, might be 'putte down'. The re-inscription of barrenness as subversive is a theme that will recur over the course of this thesis – it is seen most clearly, of course, in concerns about Elizabeth's failure to marry and secure succession. I shall show in chapter 4 how, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Emilia's determination to remain a virgin offers a direct challenge to Theseus. In this case, Margaret's unpopularity and isolation was clearly pronounced by her failure to bear a child. Once she became pregnant the terms of condemnation changed.

After her son was born, allegations against Margaret became increasingly centred around sexual misbehaviour or baby smuggling. In February 1456, a contemporary source known as *John Benet's Chronicle* reported that a certain John Helton was hung, drawn and quartered for suggesting in public bills that Edward was not the queen's son.<sup>60</sup> In 1457 a royal commission went to Norfolk to inquire into 'any treasons, misprisions, insolences or slanders committed by John Wode ... against the king's person or majesty or royalty and against the persons and honour of queen Margaret and prince Edward'.<sup>61</sup> During the late 1450s and early 1460s there were frequent rumours that the queen had abandoned Henry for the Duke of Somerset. For example, the *English Chronicle* in 1460 suggested that 'the quene was defamed and desclaudered ... that he that was called Prince, was nat hire sone, but a bastard gotten in avoutry'.<sup>62</sup> Along similar lines, Prospero de Camulio, Milanese Ambassador to the French court wrote to Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, to tell him about rumours that 'his Majesty remarked at another time, that Prince Edward must be the son of the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>59</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fifth Report: House of Lords* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1876), p. 455a, 1448 in the dean and chapter of Canterbury Archives, cited in Maurer, p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> John Benet's *Chronicle*, pp. 216-17.

<sup>61</sup> Public Record Office, *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, Vol 6, Henry VI (1452-1461), p. 404.

<sup>62</sup> *English Chronicle*, p. 78.



etc'.<sup>63</sup> Holinshed tells of the 'slaunder and obloquye' of the common people, who report that the king – not the queen – was 'not able to get a childe, and that this was not his sonne'.<sup>64</sup> Worse still, the *Brut* reports, the queen and her council took over the realm through control of the king and, with the assistance of some lords, she tried to get him to abdicate in favour of Prince Edward. The *English Chronicle* similarly describes efforts towards 'makyng pryue menys to some of the lords of Englund for to styre the kyng that he shulde resygne the croune to hure sone'.<sup>65</sup> What we have seen, in short, is that criticism of Margaret in the period repeatedly focuses on various distortions of her familial role: daughter, niece, wife or mother.

In *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy*, Jonathan Hughes argues that accusations of sexual transgression, such as we have seen in the case of Margaret above, are often directly linked with women who fulfil an autonomous political function. He shows how allegations represent displaced, but often effective, political attacks against their husbands.<sup>66</sup> His discussion is especially pertinent when it comes to the women of the Wars of the Roses. In 1441 Eleanor Cobham, the Duke of Gloucester's second wife, was arrested, charged with treason, found guilty, and exiled. Gloucester was seriously discredited by his wife's fall and his quick death left Richard Duke of York as heir presumptive. The Cobham incident shows clearly how effectively accusations against a woman can destroy the political career of her husband. Shakespeare's treatment of Eleanor's fall from power will dominate Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI* as I shall show in chapter 2: Eleanor's political aspiration and vanity in that play leads her to commit treason and the humiliation caused by her public punishment marks the defining moment in Gloucester's fall from power. Hughes details varied allegations against Eleanor Cobham and Margaret of Anjou but also Jacquetta Duchess of Bedford, mother of Elizabeth Woodville, and Elizabeth Woodville herself; all the women who exerted obvious political power in

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<sup>63</sup> 'Prospero Camulio to Francesco Sforza, March 27 1461', in *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan: 1385-1618*, Vol 1, Letter 76, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland: England*, ed. by Michael Wood (London: Folio Society, 2012), p. 651. All subsequent references are to these editions.

<sup>65</sup> *English Chronicle*, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy*, pp. 196-97.

the period.<sup>67</sup> These accusations have a twofold purpose: to cast women's exercise of power as subversive *and* to call attention to their husbands' failures to control them.

Edward IV's first parliament charged Henry with breaking his oath to Yorkists specifically in his relation to Margaret by 'assenting to her activities', and this is repeatedly seen as his greatest sin.<sup>68</sup> An anonymous ballad of 1462 condemns Henry for allowing power into the hands of his wife and it blames Margaret directly for grasping power in contravention of all normal political order. This ballad sees an inversion of natural order in Margaret's regency; it suggests her intention is to 'destroy the right line', to pervert the true course of succession and take power for herself:

It ys right a gret abusyon,  
A woman of a land to be a Regent –  
Qwene margrete I mene, that ever hath ment  
To gouerne all engeland with might and poure,  
And to destroye the Ryght lyne was here entent.<sup>69</sup>

The poem clearly shows Margaret's grasp for power as a grotesque violation of proper governance. In another anonymous poem of 1464, a rather pathetic Henry complains about his inability to govern her or to refuse her commandments.<sup>70</sup> When Arthur discovers Guenevere's affair with Lancelot in the *Morte*, he responds, 'much more I am sorryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene' (8. 685). Like Arthur, here Henry rues the day he wed her:

I weddyd a wyf out my devyse,  
That was the cause of all my mon.  
Thyll her intente seyde I euer naye;  
Ther-for I morne and no thynge am mery.

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<sup>67</sup> Hughes, *The Myth of Alchemy*, p. 196-97.

<sup>68</sup> Parliament Roll, Vol V, p. 476.

<sup>69</sup> Russell H. Robbins, *Historical Poems* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 224.

<sup>70</sup> Russell H. Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 197.

The point is that both these descriptions of Margaret are connected by the allegation that Margaret abandons the appropriate sphere for influence for a queen – the sphere of the personal and the intimate. Allegations of personal ambition dogged Margaret's career; she was tainted by association with a weak king, and she was consistently blamed for assuming power that should be his. Grafton's continuation of Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, published in the mid-sixteenth century, describes her effort to make herself regent as a 'reproche and infamy to the king, to haue one to be a Protector and gouernor of him and his realme'.<sup>71</sup> We have seen that the intercessory model of queenship gives power by channelling the king's authority; in Margaret's case, as the 'lie' of the king's authority became clearer, so contemporaneous commentators become more outraged. I will show in section III how Malory's depiction of Guenevere offers a possible response to these allegations.

At the Lady Day public procession at St Paul's Cathedral in March 1458, the Dukes of Somerset, Salisbury, Exeter and Warwick led the way hand in hand, followed by the Duke of York and the queen, who processed with hands joined. It was an action which offered a public statement of her influence and her assertion of peacemaking power. The public event shows Margaret acting out a formal role bringing factions together in reconciliation, a public political performance which enabled her to assert her influence over proceedings. Grafton describes the procession as 'wo worth dissimulacion, and false flattering countenance'.<sup>72</sup> The modern historian John Watts describes it as a 'move in the queen's struggle for hegemony'.<sup>73</sup> Margaret used the procession publicly to proclaim an image of queenly peacemaking; by deliberately highlighting her own authority and agency she positions herself at the pinnacle of public political life, and she does so via a medium of mediation.

The critic Kenneth Hodges has argued that 'active women were not automatically bad; assertive women were not automatically subversive', and his argument is borne out in several

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<sup>71</sup> Grafton's *Chronicle*, p. 655.

<sup>72</sup> Grafton's *Chronicle*, p. 659.

<sup>73</sup> John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 344.

sources; favourable commentaries about Margaret do exist, albeit they are rare.<sup>74</sup> Keith Dockray, in his modern study of late fifteenth-century sources, cites a letter to the Duchess of Milan written in October 1458 which remarks on the queen's 'wise and charitable disposition'.<sup>75</sup> Another quotation from the Paston letters describes her as forceful and active, a 'grete and strong labourid woman, for she spareth no peyne to sue hir things to an intent and conclusion to hir power'.<sup>76</sup> I think this description shows a certain grudging admiration for her forcefulness and her determination, although the reference to 'hir power' certainly suggests an ambivalence about the causes she chooses to serve. In *Treasure of the City of Ladies* Christine de Pizan had advised the queen that 'she should know how to launch an attack or how to defend against one'.<sup>77</sup> A contemporary source by alderman William Gregory known as *Gregory's Chronicle* describes how in the months following their victory at Northampton in July 1460, the Yorkist lords would have liked to have got her to London, for they 'knewe welle that all the workyngys that were done grewe by hyr, for she was more wytteyer than the kynge'.<sup>78</sup> This acknowledgement of her military and political acumen recurs almost word-for-word in Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI*; we see in that play, too, how the vision of the king's inadequacy and the idea of Margaret as political and militarily astute are deeply connected, contingent even.

Margaret was directly presented as a Worthy on several occasions in the 1450s and 1460s. The group of Nine Worthies, who are distinguished by their achievements in war, usually consists of three pagan kings – Hector, Alexander, Caesar; three Jewish heroes – Joshua, David and Judah Maccabeus, and three Christian kings – Arthur, Charlemagne and Geoffrey of Bouillon. The trope of the Worthies crosses genre distinctions; they appear frequently in paintings, statues, tapestries,

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<sup>74</sup> Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities*, p. 40.

<sup>75</sup> *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan: 1385-1618*, Vol 1, p. 18-19.

<sup>76</sup> 'Letter from John Bocking to Sir John Fastolf' in *Paston Letters*, ed. by J. Gairdner, Volume III (London: Chatto and Windus, 1904), p. 75.

<sup>77</sup> Christine, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, p. 129.

<sup>78</sup> *William Gregory's Chronicle of London*, ed. by James Gairdner (London: Camden Society, 1876), pp. 57-239 (p. 209).

pageants and so on, and sometimes historical figures are added to the original nine. For instance, the town of Coventry used pageants depicting figures of the nine Worthies to greet Margaret and Prince Edward in September 1457 and to celebrate the queen, and every Worthy swore an oath of loyalty to her. So the characterisation of the Worthies at Coventry – and elsewhere – pays public tribute to monarchical authority.<sup>79</sup> Kuskin suggests, ‘the Worthies seem most concerned with presenting the spectacle of royal authority to as broad an audience as possible’.<sup>80</sup> By pairing the literary with the political, it invests Margaret with a cultural and historical importance and authority.

There is even some evidence of sympathy for Margaret in the Tudor period when the myth of the she-wolf took form. The sixteenth-century chronicler Polydore Vergil sees her in his *Anglica Historia* as a significant political force and Henry VI as too weak to keep control of his queen’s body, let alone the kingdom. For Vergil, Henry’s unworldliness and ‘care only for his soules health’ allowed power to fall into the hands of his ambitious wife.<sup>81</sup> Margaret is seen as a manly woman ‘very desirous of renowne, full of policie, counsell, comely behaviour, and all manly qualities’ and yet at the same time a characteristically weak and feminine woman; ‘of the kinde of other woman who commonly are much given and very readie to mutabilitie and chaunge’.<sup>82</sup> Vergil shows a queen who was, ‘for diligence, circumspection and speedy execution of causes, comparable to a man’; a woman who displays ‘haute courage ... above the nature of her sex’.<sup>83</sup> Whilst there is admiration for her competence and her diligence – she is determined to ‘take upon herself’ the rule of the realm – Vergil does show Margaret’s masculine abilities as an inversion of natural order; he says, ‘thus by means of a woman sprange up a newe mischief that sette all out of order’.<sup>84</sup> In other words it is her

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<sup>79</sup> Wolffe examines this event in some detail in *Henry VI*; he points out that King Henry himself accompanied the queen but went almost unnoticed, p. 306.

<sup>80</sup> William Kuskin, ‘Caxton’s Worthies Series: The Production of Literary Culture’, *ELH*, 66. 3 (Fall, 1999), 511-551 (p. 514).

<sup>81</sup> *Three Books of Polydore Vergil* ed. by Henry Ellis (London: Camden Society, 1844), p. 71.

<sup>82</sup> *Three Books of Polydore Vergil*, p. 71.

<sup>83</sup> *Three Books of Polydore Vergil*, p. 102.

<sup>84</sup> *Three Books of Polydore Vergil*, p. 70.

autonomy, her wielding of great political power that is controversial, not just her amoral use of that power.

More often, Margaret is seen as both highly competent *and* extremely vicious. The three major historians of the mid-sixteenth century – Grafton, Hall and Holinshed – tend to imagine the character of Margaret as a perversion of queenly attributes and they go beyond Vergil in presenting a queen who is no longer just unnatural for being manly, but beast-like. It is these historians who create the ‘she-wolf’ of popular myth.<sup>85</sup> Grafton describes Margaret’s as a ‘dark queenship’ because she usurped the power of the king; he accuses her of being ‘a manly women used to rule and not to be ruled’ and ambitious for power in her own right, he sees her as ‘desirous of glory and covetous of honor’.<sup>86</sup> But at the same time, he describes her as ‘courageous’, and admits that she has a ‘wit, more then the commons sort of women’; she ‘excelled all others, as well in beautie and fauour, as in wyt and pollicie, and was of stomacke and courage, more lyke to a man, then a woman’.<sup>87</sup> Hall’s *Chronicle* describes a nature ‘belonging to a man, full and flowying of wit and wilinesse’.<sup>88</sup> For Holinshed, she was a tyrant whose ‘countenaunce was so feareful, and whose look was so terrible that to all men against whome she tooke a small displeasure, her frowning was their undoing, and her indignation was their death’.<sup>89</sup> Yet at the same time, he describes a queen of ‘great wit and no less courage’.<sup>90</sup> The key point is not the truthfulness or otherwise of these sources but the repeating patterns which we might discern in them; sinfulness, ambition, and most of all, unnaturalness.

*Hall’s Chronicle* struggled with the problem of how to attack the queen without explicitly criticising the king, which its author resolved by describing the king as ‘chaste’, ‘meke’, ‘holy’; ‘like a

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<sup>85</sup> *Hall’s Chronicle: Concerning the History of England*, ed. by Henry Ellis (London: printed for J. Hooker, 1809, reprinted New York, 1965); *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland: England*, ed. by Michael Wood (London: Folio Society, 2012). All subsequent references are to these editions.

<sup>86</sup> *Grafton’s Chronicle*, p. 670; p. 628.

<sup>87</sup> *Grafton’s Chronicle*, p. 629; p. 655; p. 625.

<sup>88</sup> *Hall’s Chronicle*, p. 208; p. 234.

<sup>89</sup> *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, p. 302.

<sup>90</sup> *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, p. 302.

yong scholer or innocent pupille'.<sup>91</sup> According to John Foxe, too, the king's role is to command and judge; functions which he completely failed to perform. In *Acts and Monuments*, published with amendments in various editions between 1563 and 1583, he traces the connection between Henry's control of his wife, and control of his realm; arguing that 'the queen thought most to preserve her husband in honour and herself in state, thereby both she lost her husband, her husband lost his realm, the realm lost Anjou, Normandy, and the duchy of Aquitaine'.<sup>92</sup> Again, here, the queen's personal ambition yields evidence of Henry VI's incapacity. The idea of a queen who usurps her husband's role is picked up by Grafton, too, who describes Henry in the following childlike terms: 'he was a very simple and innocent man', and he goes on to remark that Henry's enemies 'saide he was a coward, and had not the herte or manlynesse to bee a kyng, or meet for that office'.<sup>93</sup> Foxe, though, paints an unremittingly hostile portrait of Margaret of Anjou, claiming that her marriage was 'unprofitable and unhonourable' and she was a 'sore enemy and mortal plague' to Gloucester in particular.<sup>94</sup> He is hostile to Margaret because of her nature as 'manly woman and courageous queen'. Hall, too, describes her as 'manly woman, usyng to rule and not to be ruled'; for Hall and Foxe, it is the combination of manliness and courage that is, for both, immoral because a queen could not rule.<sup>95</sup>

In summary, I have shown in this section how, under the growing pressure of civil strife, the vision of an ambitious virago, a woman with the spirit of a man and an adulterous queen began to appear whilst Margaret was alive and then proliferated in the new Tudor era. The misrule and chaos of the period was attributed to Margaret's influence and claims of political tyranny and adultery

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<sup>91</sup> *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 208.

<sup>92</sup> *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO* (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org>. See also *Acts and Monuments*, ed. by Rev. John Hobart Seymour (London: Printed for Scott, Webster, and Geary, 1838), vi, p. 358. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>93</sup> *Grafton's Chronicle*, p. 448.

<sup>94</sup> *Acts and Monuments*, iii, p. 715-6.

<sup>95</sup> *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 249.

grew alongside her growing political power.<sup>96</sup> Equally damaging, by taking power from the king, Margaret became cast as a man, weakening and infantilising her husband; she became the ‘she-wolf’ which she has remained in popular imagination. We have seen here the extent to which representations of Margaret have been affected by the heavily gendered nature of the allegations about misrule, malice and wanton destruction. It is not strictly accurate to see her simply as the tyrant Griffiths and others describe, a symbol of the misuse of power; ‘an object lesson in how not to behave as queen’s consort’.<sup>97</sup> Even amongst her most hostile observers, there is an acknowledgement of her courage and leadership – although it is also true to say that those commentaries which are more favourable tend to be focussed more on the incapacity of the king and *his* neglect of his sovereign duty.

So far, we have seen the degree to which a queen’s acceptable behaviour is framed in the late medieval period in terms of her intercessory or mediative influence. I have demonstrated here too that although Margaret does make efforts to conform to the intercessory stereotype, or look like she is conforming, as her husband becomes increasingly incapable, she goes far beyond it. It is harder, however, to determine the extent to which perceived breaches in norms of queenship were part of a deliberate grasp for power or whether instead they were part of the propaganda of her enemies. Having seen some of the problems which Margaret faced, in section III I aim to show how Malory’s *Morte Darthur* offers a possible response to this problem of Margaret’s perceived transgression. I will argue that in adapting his sources so as to re-write Guenevere, Malory’s work exemplifies how allegations against a queen might be re-directed and her reputation reclaimed.

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<sup>96</sup> She was particularly associated with the controversial Parliament of Devils which was the final catalyst for Yorkist rebellion because it violated ancient conventions governing inheritance and property rights. In *The Reign of Henry VI* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press: 1981), Ralph A. Griffiths describes how 23 men (and one woman) were subjected to attainder and forfeiture. Particularly controversially, forfeitures applied to entire families; in a break from tradition, at their parliament rebels’ heirs were forever excluded from succession, p. 825.

<sup>97</sup> Ralph A. Griffiths in ‘The King’s Burden: The Consequences of Royal Marriage in Fifteenth-Century England’, in *Patronage, the Crown and the Provinces in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Ralph A. Griffiths (Gloucester: Sutton, 1981), pp. 33-56 (p. 53).



### III The Problem of Malory's Guenevere

Guenevere's powerful political role, like Margaret's, renders her both a conventional queen and a subversive one. I have shown that Tudor representations of Margaret are far more trenchant than are those of Margaret's own time, and it is these later accounts that are fully examined by Shakespeare. That is not what we are dealing with in Malory; his is a response to the slightly milder queen of contemporaneous record. I will demonstrate here that his re-consideration of the Guenevere of his sources attests to this fact. Guenevere causes a breach of political unity, the violation of the body-politic through her adultery and her transgression manifests itself in her relationship with Lancelot. But at the same time, she has a complementary role, tying the greatest knight to the court and cementing his allegiance to Arthur. Marriage gives Arthur's reign stability, authority and legitimacy. Moreover, Guenevere's court offers a public forum for the administration of justice *and* a channel for communication between the king and his nobles. In essence, Malory's Guenevere is a symbolic representation of the Round Table that was her dowry; she is the object that binds knights together and unifies their purpose.

Literary critics usually argue that marriage in *Morte Darthur* is consistently presented as an impediment to knightly success; Maureen Fries, for example, has described how 'wedlock restrains knightly development'. Her argument rests on the erroneous assertion that Gareth disappears from the text after his marriage to Lyonesse.<sup>98</sup> She also cites Lancelot's famous words about marriage as proof: 'for to be a weddyd man, I thynke hit nat, for than I muste couche with hir and leve armys and turnamentis, batellys and adventures' (3.161). In fact, I think Malory *does* show marriage maintaining social order by facilitating and upholding alliances: bonds between men are repeatedly

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<sup>98</sup> Maureen Fries, 'How many Roads to Camelot: The Married Knight in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', in *Culture and the King*, ed. by Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 196-211 (p. 204).

cemented by exchanges of women, for example, in the proliferation of marriages at the end of the *Book of Sir Gareth*. The discourse of queenship over time contains many examples of marriage as a reward for military success – as I shall show over the course of this thesis; for instance, in chapter 4 we shall see how the revival of chivalric tropes in the early Jacobean period offers an ideal of marriage as a source and symbol of political authority and military success, clear from Theseus's words to Emilia in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; 'of this war', he says to her, '[y]ou are the treasure and must needs be by | To give the service pay'.<sup>99</sup>

Many critics have argued that, for Malory, women are simply a way of testing and ultimately creating a perfect chivalric hero; there is a common view that women in romance exist only in order to give purpose to its heroes, that femaleness exists only to define and prove male prowess. Carolyn Dinshaw, for example, sees man *versus* man as the central defining relationship and moral structure of *Morte Darthur*, describing courtliness as only 'a cover for the patriarchal exchange economy'.<sup>100</sup> Laurie Finke and Martin Schichtman argue similarly that Malory endorses a 'sexual economy of structured violent exchanges in which masculinity is built around the continual circulation of women and wealth'.<sup>101</sup> Geraldine Heng argues that readings on women characters in Malory give the feminine only a supporting place; 'the feminine', she argues, is placed 'in essentially subsidiary relation to masculinity'.<sup>102</sup> So critical consensus posits that Arthurian women are, as Maureen Fries describes, 'essentially ancillary to men': the queen represents the highest currency in which knightly success can be measured; women are simply the designators, or markers, of the success of a male

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<sup>99</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Lois Potter, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (London: Routledge, 1996), V.3.30-32. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>100</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 107.

<sup>101</sup> Laurie A. Finke and Martin R. Schichtman, 'No Pain, No Gain: Violence as Symbolic Capital in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana*, 8. 2 (Summer, 1998), 115-34 (p. 115).

<sup>102</sup> Geraldine Heng, 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory', in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, ed. by Thelma S. Fenster and Norris J. Lacy (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), pp. 97-115 (p. 97).

societal system, courtly manners and chivalric ideals.<sup>103</sup> Finally, Edmund Reiss has described Guenevere's narrative function in *Morte Darthur* as the 'worldly alternative to the Holy Grail'.<sup>104</sup> It is clear that he sees her function as purely a public one; she only exists to offer a purpose to the court.

All the critics cited above see the public political function of marriage as antithetical to female agency or even characterisation. By contrast, in her recent survey of current thinking on Guenevere, Amy S. Kaufman takes what she describes as the 'radical position' that Guenevere is a character with a story, 'not an obstacle or accolade on somebody else's journey'.<sup>105</sup> She argues that Guenevere has emotional complexity; she is not merely an object of desire, a chivalric prize, a proof of knightly achievement. In other words, the queen can have subjectivity *and* still represent a prize. In the romance genre, the queen often represents knights' best chances of securing entrance to the chivalric community, judging members of the court, awarding prizes and rewarding its most successful members. It is problematic, though, that she must act as active judge and rewarder of virtue whilst at the same time maintaining the weakness and vulnerability which are necessary to enable her supporters to defend her and prove themselves. Margaret clearly faces this predicament: her political autonomy caused her to be seen as an exception to tropes of female vulnerability whilst her foreignness and her friendlessness ensure that she is also the paradigm of it. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall consider how Malory's Guenevere contributes to cultural discourse on queenship, addressing in particular Margaret's controversial queenship. I will examine Malory's changes from his sources in order to prove that they are especially supportive of the queen's efforts to pursue active, assertive queenship and political, and sometimes even military, power.

Guenevere's active political authority is clear from her structural presence in *Morte Darthur*; she is an implied presence in all the court scenes, even in its early books. Her relationship with Lancelot frames the Grail episode although she is absent from it; his adventure begins with his leave-

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<sup>103</sup> Maureen Fries, 'Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition', in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, pp. 59-73 (p. 61).

<sup>104</sup> Edmund Reiss, *Sir Thomas Malory* (New York, NY: Twayne, 1966), p. 162.

<sup>105</sup> Amy S. Kaufman, 'Guenevere Burning', *Arthuriana*, 20. 1 (Spring, 2010), 76-94 (p. 76).

taking from her and immediately on his return, 'sir Launcelot began to resorte unto queen Gwenievere agayne' (7.611). Even during the course of the Grail mission, we are told, his thoughts were 'ever his thoughtis prevyly were on the quene' (7.611). She has symbolic importance as a facilitator of the court and its chivalric enterprise, as I have said, but even though she is an enabler of male chivalric interaction, like Margaret, she offers complex threats to it. There are clear parallels between the two queens: both become more active in response to external crises, and both are, to a certain extent, the cause of the crisis to which they must respond. From the start, the handover of the queens to their husbands take strikingly similar form; we might compare the handover of Guenevere to Arthur in *Morte Darthur* to Margaret's arrival in England in 1448, seen in the passages below:

And in this same yere, about Midlent, they brought Quene Margaret out of high douce France.... And she landed at the towne of Hampton; and there she was worthyley receyued.... And after oure kyng come ... and brought hir to an abbey in the newe Forest ... and there the Kyng was wedded to Dame Margaret the Quene.<sup>106</sup>

And so kynge Lodgreaunce delyverd hys doughtir Gwenyver unto Merlion, and the Table Rounde with the hondred knyghtes; and so they rode freyssshly with grete royalte, what by water and by londe, tyll that they com nyghe unto London ... and in all haste the hinge lete ordayne for the maryage and the coronacion in the moste honorablist wyse. (3.60)

Both women are entirely silent during an exchange ceremony where silence emphasises the queen's political value; this is not about character but symbolic value. Both passages depict the king's action because he is the agent, the queen merely a symbol of his agency. We see no sign of female agency here as they are traded for political, dynastic and propagandistic reasons. The public ritual of transfer from father to husband implies that Margaret's presence would bring peace and material benefit to her adopted country. Pierre Bourdieu has described women as 'liquid assets, capable of

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<sup>106</sup> *The Brut or the Chronicles of England*, ed. by Friedrich W. D. Brie, EETS, os, 131, 136 (London: Kegan Paul and Oxford University Press, 1908), II, p. 488.

earning symbolic wealth', in other words, a woman's political function depends on her exchange value between men.<sup>107</sup> In *Morte Darthur* that value is symbolised by Guenevere's dowry of the Round Table, which binds Lancelot to the court, the queen and its knights to their king, and the king and queen to each other.

Guenevere's dowry also consists of the knights who will enable Arthur's great adventures; they form part of an alliance-building process that valorises the king and enhances his military ability. Field points out that Malory's portrayal of the queen's knights is entirely original; they do not crop up elsewhere in his text or any of his sources.<sup>108</sup> The queen's knights appear to be a direct reference to the fact that Margaret's military power lay with a group of knights called the 'queen's gallants', who, as Field describes them, wore a white swan livery similar to the white cross of the queen's retinue in this passage.<sup>109</sup> Margaret and Guenevere are alike in their efforts to fulfil a paternalistic sovereign function, protecting their supporters and running military campaigns in their own name but Margaret's militancy is a key source for condemnation and suspicion throughout her career. Guenevere actually fulfils a similar public function – to maintain public order; Bors describes Guenevere in *Morte Darthur* as 'a maynteyner of good knyghtes' and he goes on, 'ever she hath bene large and fre of goodis to all good knyghtes' (7.617). Guenevere's proper function as described by Bors is to protect, defend and offer a path to forgiveness for her knights. The depiction of the marriage to Guenevere and her handover accompanied by her dowry of knights is a show of military might by the king as well as a symbol of union between his supporting factions. Like Margaret, Guenevere represents an increasing threat to social order by turning symbolic into real power, merging her private and public responsibilities, and subverting her relationship with the court into a private adulterous affair. Yet Malory always makes clear, in the escalating threats to her life, her precarious position atop a political infrastructure that consistently works to exclude her.

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<sup>107</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 115.

<sup>108</sup> Field, *Malory Texts and Sources*, p. 62.

<sup>109</sup> Field, *Malory Texts and Sources*, p. 64.

Guenevere is the main defender of virtue in the early books of *Morte Darthur*. For example, she gives the final judgement of Pedyvere who had struck off his lady's head, telling him 'this is an horryble dede and a shamefull, and a grete rebuke unto sir Launcelot, but natwythstondyng his worshyp is knowyn in many dyverse contreis. But this shall I gyff you in penaunce' (3.172). Her punishment of Pedyvere is also intended to restore the stain on Lancelot for his failure to protect a lady, so in other words, her wider political role is to restore or support a natural order among knights. In this episode, Bors describes the political function of queen as 'large and fre of her goodis to all good knyghtes ... bownteuous ... with good grace', which stresses the communal, societal nature of her role here (7.617).

Her activity here mirrors Margaret's formal duties as exemplified by her letters, which I discussed earlier. Guenevere is the chief advocate for the protection of women and as a result of her intervention Pedyvere the sinner is redeemed: 'after thys knyght sir Pedyvere fell to grete goodnesse and was an holy man and an hermyte' (3.172). Just like Margaret's letters, in which she lays out her concern for the protection of vulnerable women (we saw, for example, Margaret's letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of Alice Marwarth), Guenevere sets out the terms of men's penance and she acts specifically to protect women. Her praise of the knight, Kay, is clearly framed in terms of success in love: 'what lady that ye love and she love you nat agayne, she were gretly to blame ... among all ladys I shal I bere your noble fame' (1.79). She tells Kay that his reward for service will be manifested in the assortment of ladies he picks up along the way; clearly here her moral system values deeds by reference to behaviour towards women, and rewards those same deeds using women.

Kenneth Hodges is correct, though, when he argues in *Forging Chivalric Communities* that 'in *Morte Darthur*, Guenevere is *not* an intercessor. More often than Arthur, she is the judge of difficult cases, while her judgement is often merciful, it is not the result of intercession: Arthur grants her

authority without her begging'.<sup>110</sup> Margaret was responsible for assembling troops after royalist defeat at Northampton and she led a counter offensive at the second battle of St Albans; Prospero di Camulio even has her leading her troops in the centre of the town.<sup>111</sup> Yet this is not necessarily a violation of the reasonable duties of a queen: remember Christine de Pizan's comments that women 'should know how to launch an attack or how to defend against one'.<sup>112</sup> Towards the end of the *Morte*, Guenevere's resistance is remarkable for her bravery and determination, as is her military confidence; under grave pressure from Mordred, she 'answrd hym shortely, opynly and pryvayly, that she had levir sle herselff than to be maryed with hym' and then she arms herself (8.708). Malory is here offering a vision of active military queenship as benign – as virtuous and loyal. If we look at the text, we see evidence that Guenevere has autonomous political judgement; hers is not purely an intercessory role and this is important because breaching an intercessory role can be *both* responsible *and* transgressive, as we have seen throughout this chapter.

Guenevere dominates and dictates the plot of Book 7 from the start; immediately on return from the Grail Quest, 'sir Launcelot began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne'. By now, we might note mutuality in their passion; it is now clearly a full-blown love affair as Malory describes how 'they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde' (7.611). Lancelot announces that he will leave the court in order to divert attention from the couple; his withdrawal from the queen's company is politically astute but unilateral. Guenevere reads his actions on a personal level; she considers only how his actions relate to herself, not considering how they fit in with the demands of the court at large. After Lancelot leaves her, the 'queen outworde made no maner of sorrow in shewyng to none of his bloode nor to none other, but wyte ye well inwardly, as the booke seythe, she toke grete thought' (7.613). She conceals her distress publicly, while the narrator represents to the reader her internal reflections. The narrative voice and her interior thoughts slide into each

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<sup>110</sup> Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities*, p. 131.

<sup>111</sup> *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan: 1385-1618*, Vol 1, Letter 71, p. 54.

<sup>112</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, p. 129.

other in this moment: 'she bere hit oute with proude countenance, as thoughe she felte no thought nother daungere' (7.613). This description gives us a sense of despair and her isolation as well as the need to contain her grief from public view. The moment represents a significant effort on the part of the narrator to create interiority and internal consistency of thought, to consider her subjective responses within the constraints of her formal public role. Malory deliberately condones the queen's behaviour by highlighting her vulnerability alongside her courageous efforts to fulfil her public duty. He shows real sympathy for the conflicts enshrined in queenship.

Having fallen out with Lancelot, she is then (falsely) accused of the murder of a certain Sir Patryse by giving him a poisoned apple. The queen 'was so abaysshed that she cowde none otherwayes do but wepte so hartely that she felle on a swowghe' (7.614). She does not defend herself and events are taken out of her hands, Lancelot is not there to defend her and Arthur's response is limited by his public responsibilities: 'I muste be a ryghtfull juge. And that repentith me that I may nat do batayle for my wyff, for as I deme, thys dede com never by her' (7.614). Notwithstanding Arthur's inability to fight for her in public, in private he blames her, not for poisoning Patryse, but for sending Lancelot away: "'what aylith you" seyde the kynge "that ye can nat kepe sir Launcelot upon youre side? ... now go youre way ... and requyre sir Bors to do batayle for you for sir launcelottis sake?"' (7.615). The queen is isolated by the knights', and also the king's, inability to defend her. In this episode, Guenevere becomes a privately motivated individual rather than a representative of the body politic, and this makes her vulnerable; Guenevere's political role is jeopardised by the private nature of her relationship with Lancelot and her consequent dependence on him. We saw in section II how Margaret's efforts to cement relationships, to build political allegiances and secure factional support were, unexpectedly, worthy aims for a queen but, like Guenevere, we saw that she was ultimately compromised by an absence of sovereign authority.

Guenevere faces a 'grete fyre made aboute an iron stake'; it is clear that her fate is irrespective of degree, 'for favoure, love, nother affinite, there sholde be none other by ryghtuous



jugemente' (7.618). The incident acts as a reminder that the primary judge of knights up till now has been the queen, a shocking fall from judge to judged. Lancelot showing up at the last minute confirms the sense of Guenevere as isolated, lacking a substantial support base, which adds a greater precariousness to her plight. The poisoned apple incident acts as a reminder of the destabilising impact of factional warfare and the queen's lonely position at the apex of it; like Margaret, Guenevere is the focal point for pre-existing political tensions and she is at the mercy of a political infrastructure that consistently tries to exclude her. Only Guenevere's influence over Lancelot, her private, transgressive relation to him, saves her life. The resonances are clear: Lancelot's kin, like Margaret's 'faction', has to mobilise to protect a righteous and rightful queen. Over the course of *Morte Darthur*, Malory balances Guenevere's increasing agency with the increasing seriousness of her plight.

Distinctions which Malory makes from his sources are important here, particularly those between the English tradition of the early fifteenth-century *Stanzaic Morte Darthur*, and the French of the thirteenth-century Vulgate Cycle. In the poisoned apple episode in both the *Stanzaic Morte* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Bors is armed and ready to fight for the Queen to redeem her honour. In *Mort Artu*, however, the final tale of the Vulgate, she is far more exposed; nobody agrees to help her, and the absence of a defender is tantamount to a conviction. Arthur affirms this, telling her: 'all the good knights of my court have failed me, and as a result you can be sure that tomorrow will bring you a base and shameful death'.<sup>113</sup>

That the bonds of the Round Table are under pressure is a common feature of all these texts but the fact that Bors agrees to defend her in *Mort Artu* after he knows that he will not be called upon to do so diminishes the status of the queen (102). In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, by contrast, the fact that the queen has somebody willing to defend her shows that there are redemptive virtues still at work. Then, after she is saved, she sinks to the ground with relief and, by publicly grieving for the

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<sup>113</sup> *The Death of Arthur*, ed. by James Cable (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 103. Subsequent references are to this edition.

death of sir Patryse, she returns straight to her ritualised function of duty, forgiveness and 'worshyp'. Yet even here Malory's Guenevere resists her circumscribed role in subtle ways; we read that whilst her original accuser, a knight named Mador, works hard to get back into the queen's grace, he succeeds only 'by the meanys of sir Launcelot' and not because of the queen's compassionate nature. In an ironic reversal of usual roles, here, it is *Lancelot's* intercession which allows the queen to show mercy without betraying weakness (7.621).

Although Malory inherits a weak king from his Arthurian sources, nevertheless I think he makes efforts to boost his dignity and authority. The passage below is striking in its portrayal of the intimate, interior thoughts of King Arthur:

Whan kynge Arthure undirstode the lettir, he mused of many thynges, and thought of his systyrs wordys, quene Morgan le Fay, that she had seyde betwyxte quene Gwenyver and sir Launcelot, and in this thought he studyed a grete whyle. Than he bethought hym agayne how his owne sister was his enemy, and that she hated the quene and sir Launcelot to the deth, and so he put that all oute of his thought. (5.381)

The phrase 'he studied a grete whyle' and the repetition of the word 'thought' indicates the calm, methodical nature of his consideration as well as its internal logic. He discounts what he does not want to hear – the likelihood that Guenevere is betraying him – because of suspicions over the source as well as its destructive political implications. What Malory is telling us is that Arthur, like the queen, is constrained by codes which govern appropriate behaviour. Unlike his fifteenth-century counterpart, Henry VI, king Arthur *is* explicitly and deliberately portrayed as sensible, as capable of logical and practical kingship; he is an idealised version of Henry, the king as he should be, rather than as he is. In contrast, Lancelot *can* allow himself to be ruled by his emotional and personal responses. The distinction gives Guenevere's relationship with Lancelot an intimacy that is missing with Arthur, but it also reinforces an image of a king who is at most times 'kingly', guided by the proper rules of his station and his responsibility; it showcases Malory's determined effort to boost

Arthur's dignity and authority. He achieves this both by deliberately improving the moral perspective of his queen and her political stature.

The second major episode which displays Guenevere's self-determination is the Elaine of Astolat incident in Book 7. Here, the queen sends Lancelot to participate in a tournament at Winchester and, on the way, he meets Elaine, a young maiden who asks him to wear her banner when he fights. Lancelot agrees, mainly in order to divert attention from his affair with Guenevere but Elaine later declares her love for him, and kills herself in response to his rejection. In the *Stanzaic Morte*, Guenevere's dismissal of Lancelot at the start of the story is accepted by him before it is given – which has the effect of placing Lancelot, not Guenevere, in control of the action of the scene and its conclusion. However, in *Morte Darthur*, Malory puts the dismissal in the mouth of the queen; she says, 'ryght here I dyscharge the thys courte, that thou never com within hit, and I forfende the my felysip' (7.612). The slight alteration from the source has a magnified effect on the passage; it increases her stature and her authority, putting agency directly in the hands of the queen.

Malory's Guenevere has a far less vindictive response to news of Lancelot's alleged affair with Elaine of Astolat – there's no talk of revenge, even though she was 'nygh ought of her mynde for wratthe' (7.632). There is nothing like the extreme sexual jealousy of the *Mort Artu*, for example, seen in Guenevere's words about Lancelot; 'at the moment there is nothing in this world I hate as much as I hate him, nor have I ever in my life loved him as much as I hate him now' (77). In the *Mort Artu*, Guenevere 'was so distressed that she did not know what to do next, except that she wanted to take her revenge on Lancelot or the girl, if she could' (48). By comparison, the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, which uses mainly direct speech to further the narrative, portrays the queen as grief-stricken and reproachful but not vengeful:

Alas, Launcelot-du Lake,

Sithe thou hast all my herte in wold,

[...]

I may woefully weep and wake

In clay til I be clongen cold!<sup>114</sup>

Malory tends to emphasise courtly, stable and faithful love above the fulfilment of passion, so he tones down the desire for vengeance here even whilst he shows her distress at the perceived disloyalty. We see further evidence in his treatment of Guenevere's abduction by Mellyagant in the Knight of the Cart episode later in Book 7.

Malory's Guenevere rides out with her 'quenys knyghtes' on a May morning but, with Lancelot absent from court, Mellyagant bests her knights and kidnaps the queen. Guenevere acts as conciliator and intercessor in this episode, she epitomises what the narrator himself sees as 'vertuose love' (7.649). Lancelot rides to her rescue, hitching a ride on a wagon in his desperation to reach her and Mellyagant sends Guenevere out to negotiate with Lancelot on his account. Here, again, she is far from the vindictive, impulsive, queen of Malory's French sources – Chrétien's Guenevere sends Lancelot away from her in disgust, refusing to see him because she thought he had shown excessive pride by hesitating before climbing into the wagon.<sup>115</sup> Guenevere is differently characterised here; she forces Lancelot to withdraw so as to avoid violence and she acts to protect her own knights from Mellyagant at all costs. She persuades Lancelot 'bettir ys pees than evermore warre, and the lesse noyse the more ys my worshyp' (7.655). Of course, queenly mercy can combine with self-interest; she is politician *and* protector of knights, explicitly disproving the knights' earlier characterisation of her as 'destroyer of good knyghtes' (7.617). Her moderate tone here shows up Lancelot's petulance and vengeful passion: 'ye muste com in with me pesyble, for all thyng ys put in myne honde ... all that ys amysse shall be amended, for the knyght full sore repentys hym of thys mysadventure' (7.655). She echoes Margaret's efforts to occupy a publicly conciliatory, intermediary role, for instance, in the Lady Day procession discussed earlier. Meanwhile her private action – the

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<sup>114</sup> *King Arthur's Death*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Lexington, MA: University of Exeter Press, 1986), lines 744-51. Subsequent line references are to this edition.

<sup>115</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, ed. and trans. by William W. Kibner (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 256.

protection of Lancelot by effecting his removal from harm's way – highlights the queen's ability to balance effectively her private concerns with her public responsibilities.

Guenevere's peacemaking function is unique to Malory: her conciliatory act does not appear at all in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* where the poisoned apple episode runs straight into the resumption of the affair with Lancelot and their discovery (1170-71). Also in contrast with his sources, Malory's Guenevere has complete narrative command; her words to Mellyagant are defiant, definite and angry as she pleads for the lives of her knights, offering herself up in their place, she says: 'sle nat my noble knyghtes and I woll go with the uppon thys covenante .... For I woll rather sle myselff than I woll go wyth the' (7.651). Guenevere has more agency in the Knight of the Cart episode than in any other part of *Morte Darthur*: she reminds Mellyagant of the virtues of knighthood and chivalry, reprising her early function as defender of knightly tradition. She tells him, '[t]hou shamyst all knyghthode and thyselffe and me ... I had levir kut myne owne throte in twayne rather than though sholde dishonoure me!' (7.651). Guenevere's words to Mellyagant show her to be moral and authoritative. She is an impressive tactician too; she assesses that the chivalric obligation on her knights to protect her despite being grievously wounded will ultimately result in their deaths and therefore she 'made apoyntemente for to save their lyvys and to go wyth sir Mellyagaunte' (7.653). The Mellyagant story puts her in peril in a situation where she has to act alone. Again, here, we might discern idealisation of a queen's autonomous role in the sense that she is not authorised by her husband and yet she plays a key role actively maintaining political order and stability.

Guenevere's fate is clearly intertwined with that of the Round Table. A train of events has been set in motion as a result of her adultery which results in a breakdown in civil order and which highlights the failure of the chivalric code to offer solutions to private, personal problems. Nevertheless, Guenevere has a heroic end. When the lovers are finally caught *in flagrante* by Aggravayne, who is Mordred's ally and no friend to the king, she provides a selfless vision of her love

for Lancelot: 'I wolde that they wolde take me and sle me and suffir you to ascape', a real contrast to the vengeful and self-serving nature for which she is commonly condemned (7.677). Again here, Malory chooses to present Guenevere in a favourable light. To this end too, he refrains from explicit details of their physical state when the lovers are exposed by Aggravayne, he says, 'me lyst nat thereof make no mencion' (7.676). Guenevere's heroism at this juncture is clearly not Malory's innovation; her selfless response to the disclosure of the affair mirrors that in the *Mort Artu* where she acknowledges, 'I am sorrier for your sake, may God help me, than for mine, because your death will be a much greater loss than mine' (116). It dramatically contrasts with Arthur's famous remark in the *Morte*, 'much more I am sorryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre queen; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company' (8.685). Arthur knows by now that the fellowship is broken; he mourns its passing more than he mourns the loss of his queen. This is not so much a criticism of the king, but of the failure of kingship to provide a personal solution to problems; again here, Arthur is constrained by his public role.

Guenevere is captured, and after she is 'dispoyled into her smoke', and – again – led away in preparation for death, Guenevere does not speak or say goodbye to Lancelot (8.684). Malory again highlights the solitariness of his queen, as well as the ritualised aspect of her fall from grace. Ann Astell suggests that the burning imagery would bring to contemporary readers' mind the death of Joan of Arc.<sup>116</sup> Contemporary sources directly associate Margaret with the warrior Joan; Pope Pius' *Commentaries* describe how 'the spirit of the Maid, who had raised Charles (VII of France) to the throne, was renewed in the queen'.<sup>117</sup> I will return in chapter 2 to consider how Shakespeare draws our attention to the nexus between Joan and Margaret in his three *Henry VI* plays. We shall see there how dramatic portrayals of these women enables a new discussion of the performance of femininity and female militancy.

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<sup>116</sup> Astell, *Political Allegory*, p. 139.

<sup>117</sup> *Commentaries of Pius II*, translated by Gragg, Book IX, p. 580.

Much of Book 8 shows English national political character to be disloyal, fractured and riven by petty rivalries; Malory describes all those characteristics as ‘defaughte of us Englysshemen’ (8.708). In the final book of the *Morte*, amidst the chaos of civil war, Guenevere again puts up resistance to external threat – this time through subterfuge. Whilst Arthur is away fighting Lancelot, his son Mordred takes control of England. Mordred determines that he will marry his father’s wife; she, although ‘passyng hevvy’, goes along with his plan, asking leave to go to London to purchase wedding supplies. Then, Malory tells us, ‘whan she cam to London she toke the Towre of London, suddeynly in all haste possyble she stuffed hit with all maner of vytayle, and well garneysshed hit with men, and so kepte hit’ (8.707). She defends herself against Mordred’s mighty siege and also his insistent letters and arguments; she defends herself against his words and his arms with equal success. Her military expertise, bravery and her persistence in standing up to Mordred’s continuing efforts are unique additions by Malory to his sources; the episode does not appear at all in the *Stanzaic Morte Darthur*.

By reducing the focus on Guenevere’s active role in the fracture of the Round Table, Malory ensures that her final political role is a unifying, not a divisive one; the absolute sovereignty of the king is premised on her virtue. The queen, unlike her husband, finds spiritual fulfilment and absolute redemption at the end. Guenevere’s final words to Lancelot are a prayer that she never see him again ‘wyth my worldly eyen’, a sign that she has internalised the blame for the disruption of social order; she accepts the punishment that is bestowed on her (8.722). Again, Malory invests Guenevere with a degree of heroism and generosity that is completely absent in *Mort Artu*; he changes her reaction from near silence in that text to an extraordinary statement of faith, decisiveness, sacrifice and responsibility here; ‘I commaunde the, on Goddis behalff, that thou forsake my company ... as well as I have loved the heretofore, myne harte woll nat serve now to se the; for thorow the and me ys the floure of kyngis and knyghtes destroyed’ (8.720). The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur* are more similar in portraying Guenevere as the stronger of the two at their final

meeting, but Guenevere's speech is much more emphatic and dramatic in Malory's version.

Similarities are clear between the two passages below, the first from the *Stanzaic Morte Darthur*, and the second from Malory:

Yset I am in such a place  
 My soule hele I will abide,  
 Till God send me some grace,  
 Through mercy of his woundes wide,  
 That I may do so in this place,  
 My sinnes to amend this ilke tide. (3654-59)

Therefore, sir Launcelot, wyte thou well I am sette in suche a plyght to gete my soule hele.  
 And yet I truste, thorow Goddis grace and thorow Hys Passion of Hys woundis wyde, that  
 aftir my deth I may have a sight of the blyssed face of Cryste Jesu, and on Doomesday to  
 sytte on Hys right side; for as synfull as ever I was, now ar seyntes in hevyn. (8.720)

The vocabulary is similar with its references to grace, mercy, sin and heavenly judgement. The *Morte* is more expansive, though; it contains additional details about her conversion and greater confidence that she will be redeemed and take her place at the right hand of God at Judgement Day.

Malory's Guenevere creates her own epitaph – and that of Lancelot – through her self-awareness, moral and spiritual determination. Over the course of *Morte Darthur*, and particularly in presenting her final redemption at the end, Malory re-directs his vision of queenship away from the purely intercessory and subordinate towards a vision of a queen who is self-determining. She has become the moral centre of the court because it is only through her that Lancelot's redemption is secured and he turns away from the material world. The story of Guenevere's Christian solace is new to the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and Malory; Guenevere disappears from the story in *Mort Artu* and, after escaping from Mordred's clutches, she dies. In short, Malory's treatment of queenship suggests a queen who is unpopular, isolated and yet empowered; subversive yet, at the same time, righteous.



There are clear limitations to a reading of *Morte Darthur* as *roman á clef* – we cannot, for example, use it to resolve biographical questions about whether Malory was a Lancastrian or a Yorkist. The *Morte* is not straightforwardly allegorical because it does not contain a systematic scheme of references to contemporary politics, and the suggestion that it does ignores the existence of his source materials: the story of Arthur and Guenevere already existed in many forms before Malory's intervention in the late fifteenth century. *Morte Darthur* is as much a nostalgic revision of its chivalric French sources as a piece of contemporary political commentary. It is not enough to argue that it is a 'generalised portrait' of Henry, because it works as a generalised portrait of Edward too. King Arthur is less a literal portrait of King Henry VI (or Edward IV) than a focal point for a new discussion of idealised sovereignty and kingship. I have shown that it is more useful to consider contemporary parallels when it comes to the figure of Margaret and that the *Morte* offers an unusually favourable version of a controversial queen who was an effective and stabilising political influence amidst a backdrop of civil strife and political confusion. Guenevere is not compromised by foreign connections; her barrenness means that her sexual misbehaviour never has the effect of threatening succession; she never takes on a publicly political role in the way that Margaret does. Yet despite these distinctions, in several important respects, Malory's presentation of Guenevere offers an idealised version of the controversial queen, Margaret.

It is in the distinctions between the *Morte* and its sources that the analogy to Margaret lies because here we find the crux of Malory's new vision of queenship. I have argued that Guenevere's militant queenship is a symptom of a larger disorder and the wider problems of kingship in the *Morte* are expressed through the figure of the queen. Guenevere plays a vital part in the functioning of the court; she is not merely a designator of courtly identity, as most critics suggest.<sup>118</sup> As Arthur's power declines and the unity of his men fractures, Guenevere's agency comes to the fore. Her active resistance to Mordred's tyranny and her final spiritual epiphany are unique to Malory and they take

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<sup>118</sup> See page 66.

their place alongside a narrative of increasingly ineffectual male sovereignty. I have shown that Malory's changes deliberately construct a version of queenship that is autonomous, military even, as well as a vision of marriage as politically stabilising. The textual history of Margaret focuses on precisely those same attributes – her militancy, her compromised loyalty – even whilst it takes them as evidence of her perversion of her rightful role.

The textual history of Margaret is heavily affected by a literary tradition of subservient or intercessory queenship laid down in the manuals for queens which proliferated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (we saw a few examples on pages 41-43). The critic Louis Montrose influentially argued that the key concern for the New Historicist critic is 'the historicity of texts and the textuality of history'; according to him, text and history produce each other.<sup>119</sup> Notwithstanding methodological problems with new historicism which I detailed in my introduction, I have shown here that fictionality is an important, albeit unacknowledged, aspect of historiographical texts on Margaret.<sup>120</sup> The *Morte's* deliberately nostalgic recreation of an imaginary past tells us something about the predicament of Margaret of Anjou; it draws attention to similarities with its contemporary political environment even despite the obvious distinctions. I have read the *Morte* as, in part, an argument that Margaret's militancy is a responsible, or at least inevitable, response to male failure.

The textual histories of Margaret and Guenevere expose in very similar ways the problems inherent in an intercessory model of queenship. A closer look at Malory's queen has enabled me to draw attention to the heavily stylised nature of attacks on queen Margaret and to suggest that, in general, historians have failed to acknowledge the impact of pre-existing literary stereotypes about transgressive women on depictions of Margaret; stereotypes that call for intercession or subordination underlying the exercise of female power. I have argued that the *Morte* subverts chivalric expectations for intercessory queenship by offering a defence of Guenevere's active

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<sup>119</sup> Louis Montrose, 'Professing the Renaissance: The Politics and Poetics of Culture', in *The New Historicism*, ed. by Harold Aram Veeser (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.15-37 (p. 23).

<sup>120</sup> 'Introduction', page 15.

queenship. The deliberately benign manifestation of autonomous, even military, queenship in the *Morte* is exceptional in its acknowledgement that traditional trope of intercessory queenship is not, always, the most responsible solution to problems of male sovereignty and political collapse.

We have seen that the gaps between Malory's text and his sources suggest that the queen's self-determination is part of the performance of good sovereignty. A longstanding literary concern about good queenship has fed into both the *Morte* and the historiographical tradition describing Margaret and feeds also into Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays, as I shall show in chapter 2. We shall see how Shakespearean innovation in those plays – those areas in which he deviates most from his sources and is most indebted to medieval romance – problematises the idea of Margaret's agency whilst at the same time celebrates it as the necessary consequence of male political failure.

## Conclusion

In section I of this chapter, I discussed the extent to which common expectations of queenship force women to navigate a precarious line between privately motivated and publicly judged behaviours. I have used common cultural discourses to highlight a recurring pattern of idealised queenship based on mediation, deference and subordination. I have also shown the very real anxiety about the influence women exert over male relationships that underlie political power, the threatening otherness of queens and the private nature of their influence which might be easily corrupted or distorted. In section II, we saw how representations of Margaret are particularly heavily affected by the gendered nature of allegations of misrule, sexual deviancy and viciousness. Although Margaret made an effort publicly to conform to an intercessory stereotype, as her husband's mental health collapsed, she clearly strayed far beyond it.

Like Margaret, Guenevere is particularly dangerous in inspiring loyalty separate from that offered to the king. And Guenevere's unpopularity echoes that of Margaret. But it is significant that

in *Morte Darthur* the queen is pivotal in the establishment as well as the later fall of the Round Table; she restores her husband's patrimony and provides constant visual proof of Arthur's right to the throne, bringing stability and order to the court. I have shown in section III that Malory deliberately sets out to show that direct and active queenship is vital for the stability of the court; Guenevere's control over Lancelot's actions, her opposition to Mellyagant and the resistance she puts up to Mordred's attempted kidnapping show her to be an autonomous political figure in her own right and proves that she exerts crucial power over its successful functioning. Malory rehabilitates Guenevere to a greater extent than is generally acknowledged. In particular, he underplays her role in the disintegration of the Round Table by allowing her a final, spiritual conversion which is unique and exemplary. Lancelot's final conversion is a result of, and entirely dependent upon, Guenevere's. Her virtuous end is a critical part of her story. She refuses to go away with him, and she refuses his kiss. This often morally ambivalent character in fact ends up offering a consistently Christian morality. The autonomy which Malory gives his queen and his vision of Guenevere as agent, as physically in control of her situation, are profoundly sympathetic.

We have seen in treatments of *both* Margaret and Guenevere a fear of the disruptive political power of women and also of women who refuse to fulfil their expected political function. These women become in some respects mirror images of one another: threatening, uncontrollable, and socially transgressive. Yet the figure of Guenevere offers Malory the opportunity to portray a queen with a unifying political role; one who has an overwhelmingly positive and stabilising public function. Guenevere permits a defence of Margaret which is not couched in the norms of queenly subordination. It becomes possible to see how the deliberately benign treatment of Guenevere is likely to have been recognised by contemporary readers as an endorsement of Margaret's active military and political role.

Queenly ideology mandates a subordinate and intermediary queen, but I have shown, too, in this chapter, how the fictional presentation of a powerful queen enables Malory to show

potentially subversive queenship as politically acceptable. *Morte Darthur* does not offer an allegorical parallel of queen Margaret and queen Guenevere so much as a re-inscription of queenship in a period when ideals of queenship were particularly troubled and female power particularly controversial. Given the contemporary resonances of the text, Malory's affirmation of the queen's autonomy, his effort to raise her own voice against a wall of hostility and allegation, suggests that a militant queen such as Margaret is considerably less malignant than her accusers imply. We should see Malory's nuanced approach, rewarding her active queenship with redemption at the end of his work, as not so much a formal declaration of support for the Lancastrian party – as some critics suggest – as a generalised plea for a woman who was a stabilising political influence amidst the civil strife of the fifteenth century.

Whilst a few similarities have been noted between Margaret and Guenevere, critics have not yet fully explored the extent to which Malory's Guenevere offers the solution to a problem of queenship that is not entirely made by, or unique to, Margaret. My suggestion that women's function is to police, validate and reward male chivalric behaviour is a theme that will recur in later chapters. We have seen here, too, that intercession or mediation is not the only model of queenship available in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Malory's Guenevere offers a positive vision of what happens when a queen becomes her own agent, a questioning of the ritualised intercessory approach to female power that, we shall see, will re-assert itself throughout English literary history. We shall see through the rest of this thesis that Malory's new treatment of Guenevere plays its part in a wider discussion of queenship and female political agency which begins way before and lasts way beyond the controversy of Margaret of Anjou's controversial leadership.

## Chapter 2

### Shakespeare's Romance History: In Defence of Margaret

We saw in chapter 1 that representations of queenship place an enduring emphasis on vulnerability and mediation as a source of power but that the controversial career of Margaret of Anjou forces a re-examination of those medieval intercessory ideals. Shakespeare's presentation of Margaret in his *Henry VI* plays owes a great deal to medieval chronicle and romance sources but it is the gaps between his work and his sources which show how these three plays operate as a study of female agency and the associated controversy of women in power. Complex critical and theatrical histories and various editorial controversies have led to misapprehensions about women's roles in these plays and critics often read the *Henry VI* plays as mere precursors to *Richard III*. I wish to argue, instead, that the primary focus in these plays is not the emerging Richard but the complicated, dramatically dominant Margaret; Margaret is not merely a subverter of plot for Shakespeare here – she is its main agent.

It is first of all necessary to consider the critical context which I am challenging. The most famous critical landmark in the study of the three *Henry VI* plays is E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays*, published in 1943, which argues that Shakespeare's histories offer a meta-narrative of emergent Tudor power. According to Tillyard, these plays show the Wars of the Roses to be a punishment for the sins of Henry IV; that king's legacy is the disintegration of social order and English political power manifested in the reign of his grandson. Tillyard asserts that 'Shakespeare shows us chaos itself, the full prevalence of civil war, the perpetuation of one horrible deed after another'.<sup>1</sup> Order is only re-asserted with the arrival of Henry Tudor. In other words, he sees these plays as manifesting a view of history that follows a providential, ultimately moral, narrative arc.

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 194.

Many other influential critics (and theatrical performances) reflect this providential bias; Andrew Cairncross in his edition of *3 Henry VI* for Arden 2, for example, describes a plan that involves 'a universal political and moral pattern, by which an original crime – the deposition and murder of Richard II by Henry IV is expiated by the chaos of civil war and tyrannical autocracy'.<sup>2</sup> John Barton and Peter Hall studied in Cambridge under Tillyard and their influential adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays for the RSC in 1963, newly entitled *The Wars of the Roses* (which I will discuss later in more detail), manifests his providentialism, as is clear from Hall's own description: 'Bolingbroke has to depose Richard II in order to claim the garden of England [...] but he, and his family, suffer retribution for generations'.<sup>3</sup>

Gradually over the 1970s, critical thought turned against Tillyard, and scholars began to argue instead that the plays deny moral justice rather than affirming it; the new consensus saw the chaos and social decay caused by political ineptitude and human vanity as unaffected by any wider moral system. For example, David Frey argued in 1970 that the *Henry VI* plays 'cast serious doubt on the Tudor view of history by raising fundamental questions concerning the concepts of divine justice, personal providence, and divine intervention'.<sup>4</sup> Other opponents of Tillyard argued that Shakespeare's plays are based on universal qualities of human nature; Robert Ornstein described Shakespeare's progress in the history plays as 'a journey of artistic exploration', not just a piece of political propaganda; a journey that 'led almost unerringly beyond politics and history to the universal themes and concerns of his mature art'.<sup>5</sup> Tillyard had seen the plays as a dramatic re-enactment of divine providence at work and he had assumed a fixed and stable progression of history through to the rise of the Tudor dynasty. But these critics increasingly viewed Tillyard's own

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI*, ed. by A.S. Cairncross, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 2' (Cambridge, MA: Methuen, 1964), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *The Wars of the Roses* (London: BBC Books, 1970), p. x. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Frey, *The First Tetralogy: Shakespeare's Scrutiny of the Tudor Myth: A Dramatic Exploration of Divine Providence* (Paris: Mouton de Gruyter, 1976), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Ornstein, *A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievement of Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 31.

work as ‘an ideological legitimization of an existing social order’, arguing, on the contrary, that in these plays Shakespeare set out to undermine Tudor orthodoxy.<sup>6</sup> In an influential work published in 1982, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, Stephen Greenblatt denied the existence of ‘one Elizabethan mind’ whose thinking was everywhere conditioned by a conservative ‘world picture’; his work effectively rejected Tillyard’s attempt to attribute a ‘single political vision’ to an ‘entire population’ or even to ‘an entire literate class’.<sup>7</sup> Greenblatt tends instead towards the view that these plays are rooted in the anarchic political considerations of their period of composition. In this chapter I shall investigate the medievalism of the *Henry VI* plays which, I shall argue, further calls into question the credibility of the Tillyardian version of heroic national myth. My new reading of Margaret as the dramatic centre of these plays disproves, too, Tillyard’s vision of the plays as a patriarchal narrative, a struggle between generations of fathers and sons.

The three *Henry VI* plays have often been taken to be experiments by a young man learning his craft but this view, too, is attributable to the influence of Tillyard on modern critics. Tillyard had described the few ‘splendid things in it’ as ‘islands sticking out of a sea of mediocrity’, and even post-Tillyardian critics have been surprisingly affected by his assumption that they represent jumbled plays by an immature playwright still learning his craft.<sup>8</sup> Alexander Leggatt argues in *Shakespeare’s Political Drama: the History Plays and the Roman Plays* that the tetralogy only begins to make sense ‘if we can see it as framed by the death of a hero and the birth of a monster’.<sup>9</sup> In other words, he sees the *Henry VI* plays as valuable only on account of their developing portrait of Richard of Gloucester, as part of a larger narrative. In this chapter, I seek to challenge this view; we shall see that the narrative and dramatic centre of these plays is Margaret, not Richard.

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Introduction’, in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. by J. Dollimore and A. Sinfield (Sussex: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (Oklahoma, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Tillyard, *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare’s Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 31.



New Historicists have paid more attention to the histories than most other critics over the past fifty years (although even they tend to be more interested in the second tetralogy). For Stephen Greenblatt, an Elizabethan belief in providentialism functions as a means of 'social and political control'.<sup>10</sup> Leah Marcus also focuses on Elizabethanism as a theme; she argues that the portrayal of Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI* and the play's anxiety at the female usurpation of military power has its roots in the play's Elizabethan context. She argues that the figure of Joan functions as a distorted image of Queen Elizabeth, suggesting that 'the figure of Joan brings into the open a set of suppressed cultural anxieties about the Virgin Queen, her identity, and her capacity to provide continuing stability for the nation'.<sup>11</sup> According to these influential critics, Shakespeare's histories manifest contemporary concerns about the queen and succession; her foreign policy, the relationship with France and a national history that has become dimmed by the humiliations of the loss of land and influence after the darkest period of the Wars of the Roses.

The fact of a regnant queen necessarily changes the discourse of queenly power. There have been many volumes written about Elizabeth's symbolic separation of the 'body politic' from the 'body natural', her 'body politic' representing the body of a king (strong, masculine and protective), whilst her 'body natural' is a still-fragile body that observes the proprieties of vulnerable femininity and sexual purity.<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth's composite persona enabled her to exert paternalistic sovereign power whilst at the same time offering allies and enemies alike the constant prospect that she might marry in order to secure alliances overseas and shore up her power. In her famous speech on the battlefield at Tilbury (which may never have happened – Winfred Schleiner has argued that the speech is, in fact, entirely apocryphal), Elizabeth emphasised the chasm between the feminine frailty of the body natural and the masculine strength of the body politic; she is quoted as saying 'I know I

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion: *Henry IV* and *Henry V*', in *Political Shakespeare*, pp. 18-47 (p. 45).

<sup>11</sup> Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontent* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed description of the theory of the queen's two bodies, see Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: RHS, 1977).

have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too'.<sup>13</sup> By emphasising the maleness of the body politic in this way, Leah Marcus argues, Elizabeth attempted to lessen the cultural anxiety about a female ruler: she both denies that there was a woman on the throne and at the same time reminds her audience that she was 'no mere woman'.<sup>14</sup> James Aske's verse *Elizabetha Triumphans* published in 1588 in the wake of the Armada victory describes Elizabeth: 'Most bravely mounted on a stately Steede | With Truncheon in her hand (not us'd thereto) | [...] | In nought unlike the Amazonian Queene'.<sup>15</sup> Aske's verse with its heroic and its phallic imagery lays claim to a set of explicitly masculine characteristics; the queen is brave and war-like, she is 'bravely mounted', she is armed, and she is confident like the Amazon Queen herself. Aske deliberately confers on Elizabeth an unparalleled military strength as well as a mythic heroism by which he aims to 'masculinise' her. This interplay between male and female identities seen in his portrayal of the queen is echoed in the portrayal of Queen Margaret in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays, as I shall show.

The field of action for women in Shakespeare's first tetralogy is very broad; Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin list women's roles here as 'lover, mistress, military campaigner, orator, courtly lover, warrior, daughter, mother, custodian of dynastic legitimacy, and witch'.<sup>16</sup> These plays offer a portrait of English heroic history, then, in which women are both highly prominent and highly active. As in Shakespeare's comedies, an intense concern with transgression, concealment and disguise runs throughout these plays, and this concern is particularly centred on Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI* and Margaret of Anjou in *2* and *3 Henry VI*. Howard and Rackin point out that playscripts for the first

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<sup>13</sup> See Winfred Schleiner, "'Divina Virago': Queen Elizabeth as Amazon", *Studies in Philology*, 75.2 (Spring, 1978), 163-80. This is a transcription supposedly made on occasion of her speech by her chaplain, Dr Lionel Sharp, quoted in full by Susan Frye, 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 23.1 (Spring, 1992), 95-114 (p. 98).

<sup>14</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> James Aske, 'Elizabetha Triumphans', in *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. by John Nichols (London: John Nichols and Son, 1823), Vol II, 545-582 (p. 570).

<sup>16</sup> Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 26.

tetralogy, *King John* and *Henry VIII* give four times as many lines to female characters as in the much better-known second tetralogy, and they argue that in these plays the women take on far more important roles in the action.<sup>17</sup> And yet feminist critics have paid far less attention to Shakespeare's earliest histories than they have to his other plays. In order to delineate the critical field for the *Henry VI* plays, we are forced to go back thirty years, much further into history than would be the case for a study of the second tetralogy.

Those critics who *have* written on *Henry VI* are split over whether the anxiety about women's roles in these plays is 'authorial'. In *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*, Coppelia Kahn claims that 'liaisons with women are invariably disastrous because they subvert or destroy more valued alliances between men'.<sup>18</sup> This is strikingly similar to the critical consensus about *Morte Darthur*, as we saw in chapter 1, which posits that women's function in the plot is to validate or oppose male action. Kahn argues that Shakespeare does not share the misogyny of his characters, that the plays are *about* misogyny, not themselves misogynistic. Linda Woodbridge suggests on the contrary that 'women's tongues are instruments of aggression or self-defense; men's are the tools of authority. In either case speech is an expression of authority; but male speech represents legitimate authority, while female speech attempts to usurp authority or rebel against it'.<sup>19</sup> Woodbridge seems to see persuasion or intercession as the only available form of female power; she describes speech that is not subject to male authorisation as threatening and unnatural.

Phyllis Rackin has influentially argued that the women of all three *Henry VI* plays represent 'opponents and subverters of the historiographical enterprise'.<sup>20</sup> In this chapter I will argue, on the contrary, that Margaret, like Guenevere, has a far greater role than simply policing masculinity: in all

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<sup>17</sup> Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> Phyllis Rackin, 'Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories', *Theatre Journal*, 37.3 (October, 1985), 329-44 (p. 329).

these plays there is space for autonomous queenship and proactive leadership that is not always seen as subversive. In short, although the controversy of female authority is rightly central for critics, I will argue that many of their treatments are inaccurate. I seek to prove instead that three elements of these plays – their textual instabilities, their use of archaism and their deliberate nostalgia – are all important tools for enabling us to see the ways in which Shakespeare reconciles controversies about female power with the fact of a regnant queen, and even, sometimes, to valorise autonomous queenship.

## I      **Militancy and the Masculine Female in *Henry VI***

In this section, I will analyse the roles of Margaret and several other powerful women in the first tetralogy – their function and their narrative importance – as I seek to highlight in particular their political autonomy. Differences in performance can, of course, render Margaret either a politically-motivated warrior queen or an unnatural traitor who drains the life out of her husband and his country due to malice and lust (or both). Both versions are supportable, but for the critic focussed on the text the real question is whether accusations of malice should be read as an inevitable result of Margaret's gender *or* of her own political aspiration. Holderness sees the women of these plays as occupying 'absent or marginal spaces'.<sup>21</sup> I shall argue, on the contrary, that the function of women is far from peripheral here; Margaret is the archetypal 'insider', fulfilling the roles of politician, of military commander and even, at times, of proxy king.

Question marks linger over the order of composition, but it is likely that *1 Henry VI* post-dates the other two parts.<sup>22</sup> If we take them for the time being in order of historical chronology

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<sup>21</sup> Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> The earliest reference comes from a record of Philip Henslowe's earnings of £3 16s 8d on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1592 for a performance of 'Harey the vi' by the Lord Strange's Men (see John Cox and Eric Rasmussen's Introduction to *3 Henry VI* for Arden 3, p. 5). Thomas Nashe wrote of 'brave Talbot' in *Piers Penniless* which was published 8<sup>th</sup> August 1592. In September 1592, Robert Greene's *A*

(which is the usual order of performance), we might begin by considering the figure of Joan in *1 Henry VI* because Joan and Margaret are intimately connected; the death of Joan leads directly to the first entrance of Margaret. From the start Joan is seen as concealing her true nature under a fake skin, a hide, or, later, under armour, and she is a liar: as Alençon remarks of her, 'these women are shrewd tempters with their tongues'.<sup>23</sup> The allegation that Joan is unnatural and yet erotic, that she reverses the normal female profile (gentle, loyal, passive), is probably the most serious she faces, and it will recur in depictions of Margaret. It is declared of Joan later that she is 'a maid, and [...] so martial'; as though virginity and soldiering are mutually exclusive (II.2.21). Yet it is also acknowledged that her unnaturalness, her duplicity and her disguise are military assets that can be harnessed for victory on the battlefield. Burgundy tells Talbot: 'Pray God she prove not masculine ere long | If underneath the standard of the French | She carry armour, as she hath begun' (II.1.22-24). We see from his words that Joan's power lies in her ability to conceal her gender and yet to use it at opportune moments. Talbot describes Joan as '[f]oul fiend of France and hag' and in her 'fair persuasions mixed with sugared words', he sees her as both temptress and politician (III.2.51; III.3.18). Joan's concealment is contrasted to Talbot's honest valour and plain dealing; he is described as 'the trust of England's honour' (IV.3.73).

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*Groatsworth of Wit* was entered in the Stationer's register, singling out an 'upstart Crow' in particular one 'beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you' (reprinted Menston, 1969, 84-5). So, whilst we don't have a precise date for each part, it is reasonable to assume public performances of all 3 parts had taken place by the end of 1592, when all these references appear. In respect of the order of composition, Edward Burns argues in his introduction to 3<sup>rd</sup> Arden edition of *1 Henry VI* that *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* are standalone entities and that *1 Henry VI* is a free-standing piece, a sort of 'prequel' to those plays. I do not intend to rehearse his arguments in detail; the evidence that they form part of a pre-planned chronological sequence is weak and it is now a consensual position that *1 Henry VI* postdates (slightly) the other two parts.

<sup>23</sup> William Shakespeare, *1 Henry VI*, ed. by Edward Burns, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (Liverpool: Routledge, 2000), I.2.123. All subsequent references are to this edition.

Phyllis Rackin describes the transgressive women of the *Henry VI* plays as anti-historians, as subverters of a grand historical enterprise;<sup>24</sup> yet I think it is clear from the text that they are themselves imbued with historical importance. Talbot and Burgundy share a concern about Joan's political ability and her military influence. The view of Joan (and of Margaret) as a subverter of a predominantly male plot misses the point that it is precisely when she is absorbed *into* the fold of that male world that she becomes most powerful. Unlike Eleanor Cobham, who always remains on the periphery of the male court, Joan (and Margaret later) is *the* primary player at court: that is precisely what renders her so frightening and so powerful. Rather than subverters of political action, in fact women are its progenitors.

The English historical project is obviously highly dependent on female procreative ability, a fact which would have been well appreciated by Elizabethan audiences: we might see the discussion about the applicability of Salic Law to France in the opening scenes of *Henry V* as evidence of the practical importance of female rights to inherit. As is painstakingly explained in that play, Henry V's claim to France ran through Edward III, who inherited his claim from his mother, Isabella, daughter of Philip IV of France. Therefore, through the female line, Henry is urged to '[s]tand for your own, unwind your mighty flag, | Look back into your mighty ancestors'.<sup>25</sup> The central issue of all these history plays is the concern about the fundamental role women play in the development of English nationhood and their ability to subvert it; a concern about their power to exercise control over individual men and over a nation. The fact that women are not the opposers of the historical project, but its chiefest determinant of success, is *the* central paradox of these plays.

The exercise of female agency and autonomy became increasingly challenging to social norms as the positioning of women at the nexus of inherited power gave rise to increasingly powerful female rulers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unsurprisingly, the new female

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<sup>24</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> *Henry V*, I.2.101-102.

sovereignty is frequently reflected in the literature of the time, yet a controversy about autonomous queenship continued even *after* the unmarried Elizabeth had ascended to the throne. Perhaps the most famous example is the Scottish reformer John Knox's insistence that 'to promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire aboue any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reueled will and approued ordinance, and finalie it is the subuersion of good order, of all equitie and iustice'.<sup>26</sup> There is evidence, too, that female rule is to be tolerated as long as it yields stability and consistency for a nation. Sir Thomas Smith describes an idealised female role in *De Republica Anglorum: The maner of governement or policie of the Realme of Englande*, written for Edward VI in 1583:

those whom nature hath made to keepe home and to nourish their familie and children ... except it be in such cases as the authorities is annexed to the bloud and progenie, as the crowne, a duchie, or an erledome for there the blood is respected .... These I say haue the same authoritie, although they be women or children in that kingdome, dutchie or erledome, as they should have had if they had bin men of full age.<sup>27</sup>

Here Smith acknowledges that the patriarchal order that secures security and stability of rule itself depends upon women, and he concedes that their gender comes below their bloodline on the list of qualities that designate them rulers.

The figure of Margaret in Shakespeare's first tetralogy is aligned with various medieval texts in its suggestion that intermediary queenship is not the only model of female power that is socially acceptable. Margaret's detractors dredge up the usual conventions about her appropriation of male roles, yet there are many instances in which Margaret's feminine nature and her military role are not mutually opposed *or* seen as a perversion of nature. She is several times described as Amazonian – she 'plays the Amazon' (*3 Henry VI*, IV.1.106). Amazonian women do not require or consolidate male

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<sup>26</sup> *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous regiment of Women* (London, 1558), ed. by Edward Arber, English Scholar's Library, 1880), p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *De Republica Anglorum: The maner of governement or policie of the Realme of Englande*, 1583 (London: imprinted by JohnWidet for Gregory Seton, 1589), p. 28.

bonding; Amazons stand entirely outside a patriarchal system of exchange and intermediation between the sexes. I will return to this subject in chapter 4 when I discuss resistance to patriarchal power by the conquered Amazon queens of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The ability to stand outside the patriarchal political system is both Margaret's strength and her weakness: the dissolution of male bonds gives her agency and autonomy, enabling her to fill the vacuum caused by the incompetent king. Margaret the warrior queen is clearly linked with Elizabeth; as proxy 'king', she becomes the legitimate leader of the Lancastrian camp. Male ties are not helpful here; father kills son, son father, men die without heirs, brothers compete with brothers. As an Amazonian woman who is unaffected by those male ties, her power is unconstrained. Although critics generally posit women as the raw matter out of which homosocial bonds are built, I argue that Margaret's power comes from being sited outside of this role entirely.<sup>28</sup>

The depiction of Margaret as an Amazon is inevitable given her military role in the Lancastrian campaign, but it is not only used as a term of abuse. The mythology of the Amazon symbolises collective anxiety about female power but it is a term that recurs frequently during the reign of Elizabeth as a means of expressing the necessity for a form of political power that is inaccessible to male interference. Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, writes to Elizabeth exhorting her to conquer Guiana, asking that:

her majesty herby shall confirme and strengthen the opinions of al nations, as touching her great and princely actions. And where the south border of Guiana reacheth to the dominion and empire of the amazons, those women shall hereby heare the name of a virgin, which is not onely able to defende her own territories and her neighbours, but also to invade and conquere so great Empyres and so farre removed.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Katherine Schwarz, 'Fearful Simile: Stealing the Breach in Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49.2 (Summer, 1998), 140-67.

<sup>29</sup> *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1596), ed. by Sir Robert H. Schomburgk, Hakluyt Society, 1<sup>st</sup> ser, no 3 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1848), p. 28.



In this passage, Elizabeth becomes both like and unlike the Amazon queens as Raleigh exhorts her to assert her feminine military might to distinguish herself from the female warriors she resembles.

Elizabeth reflects perfectly the contradiction: as Cecil described her after her death, she was 'more than a man, and, in troth, sometime less than a woman'; she is a female ruler, a military leader, a virgin, and she claims both a maternal and a paternal responsibility over her country.<sup>30</sup>

There are other contemporary views of female warriors who are glorious and heroic. For example in Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* the narrator remarks '[b]y record of antique times I find, | That women wont in warres to beare most sway, | And to all great exploits them selves inclind'.<sup>31</sup> The return of temperance comes about by the subjection of those same warrior women but the narrator concedes that whilst 'vertuous women wisely understand, | That they were borne to base humilitie', an exception will be made if 'the heavens them lift to lawfull sovereigntie' (5.5.25). So in *The Faerie Queene*, just as we saw in Thomas Smith's words earlier, the requirements of inherited power override the problems of gender. Whilst absolute female sovereignty is a clear source of suspicion and concern in Elizabethan England, that concern is in many cases overridden by the need for stability and strong governance. This sense of necessity, of female power as preferable to a power vacuum, is precisely what enables Shakespeare's Margaret to stray beyond the confines of an orthodox intercessory role; to take military command, and yet remain a responsible leader.

The concern about the exercise of influence becomes even more acute when it comes to Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI*. The low-born Joan proclaims her own power by physically besting the French king in one-to-one combat. Leah Marcus argues that, 'figured remarkably like Elizabeth in many attributes, Joan represents a subversive challenge to gender. Joan, like the queen whose ghostly image she echoes, functions as a spectacular, and intensely troubling, site of gender

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<sup>30</sup> Sir Robert Cecil to Sir John Harington, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1603, printed in John Harington, *Nugae Antiquae* (1779: reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), Vol 2, p. 264.

<sup>31</sup> Sir Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queen*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (Kingston, Canada: Pearson, 2001), 3.2.2. All subsequent references are to this edition (by book, canto, and verse).

display'.<sup>32</sup> What Marcus sees as most troubling about Joan, in other words, is her casting off of normal gender functions and identifiers. Most of the Tudor English chroniclers reflected similar concerns about Joan's behaviour. Edward Hall in 1548 described Joan as 'a rampe of suche boldness' who would 'do thynges that other yong maidens bothe abhorred and wer ashamed to do'.<sup>33</sup> The idea of Joan betraying normal feminine archetypes continues in Holinshed, who describes her in 1587 as 'shamefullie rejecting hir sex abominable in acts and apparel to have counterfeit mankind'.<sup>34</sup> John Stowe describes her as 'a monstrous woman'.<sup>35</sup> All these sources emphasise her deceitfulness and her disguise; they see her falsely portraying herself as a virtuous woman. Her true nature is shameful both *because* it is disguised by male armour and attire, but also because *what* it disguises is itself loathsome. The point here is that her wanton sexuality marks her out as female, of course, but it also marks her as 'un-female' because it betrays those modes of behaviour by which courtly women are traditionally identified. Instead, interestingly, chastity and the modesty of maiden youth is identified in all three plays with the figure of the king himself; his childlike lack of authority and decisiveness, his female tears and laments, are as misplaced in a man as are Joan's promiscuity and fierceness in a woman.

Carole Levin and John Watkins have suggested that Catholicism is used as a distancing mechanism in *1 Henry VI* to differentiate between the warring two nations, England and France.<sup>36</sup> They argue it presents the English as 'Protestants before their time', which derives from their simple faith in God, Talbot's 'by God and Saint George' (IV.2.55); whilst the French are presented as Catholics whose superstition and devotion to the Virgin Mary denotes their primitivism and superstition. Certainly, explicitly Roman Catholic imagery centred around Joan highlights the extent

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<sup>32</sup> *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Hall's Chronicle* (London: printed for J. Hooker, 1809; reprinted New York, 1965), p. 148. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>34</sup> *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 288.

<sup>35</sup> *Annales of England* (London, published by Ralfe Newbury, 1592), p. 597.

<sup>36</sup> Carole Levin and John Watkins, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 62.

to which she corrupts idealised feminine tropes; she is presented as the very opposite of the Holy Virgin Mary whom she invokes. She refers to herself as 'a humble handmaid', and she describes her vision of Mary as follows:

God's mother deigned to appear to me,  
And, in a vision full of majesty,  
Willed me to leave my base vocation  
And free my country from calamity. (I.2.78-81)

Joan allies herself with *the* icon of idealised femininity; whilst the English see her not as a saint but as the very opposite – 'witch', 'foul fiend', 'hag' and 'strumpet'. The contrast between the two perspectives is extreme, of course, and similar problems of perspective arise in respect of Margaret too; most obviously at the end of *3 Henry VI* when she is visually aligned with Mary as she swoons over the body of her son. Here, Joan's military power is also explained as deriving from the Blessed Virgin; in positive terms at first, even though her militarism later comes to be seen clearly as an illicit and unnatural usurpation of power exemplified by her appropriation of male armour. Nevertheless, Joan's militarism is less problematic than Margaret's because her power really is peripheral; in theory at least, she is controlled by the Dauphin.

In *2 Henry VI*, Margaret is referred to as England's 'dear-bought queen'.<sup>37</sup> From the start she is traded between English and French national interests, but she resists her prescribed role from the start. Not only does she fail to deliver those economic benefits for which she has been 'traded', she asserts her own will over a trade in which she is supposed to be a passive player. However, her political will is explicitly shown to be sensible when compared to Henry's, for example, in her warning about his mismanagement of his quarrelling nobles:

Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted;  
Suffer them now and they'll o'ergrow the garden

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<sup>37</sup> William Shakespeare, *2 Henry VI*, ed. by Ronald Knowles, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (Reading: Routledge, 1999), I.1.249. All subsequent references are to this edition.

And choke the herbs for want of husbandry. (III.1.31-33)

Margaret claims a woman's feeling in this passage, or at least she chooses to *perform* a woman's feeling. In *2 Henry VI*, there are several instances in which she lays claim to femininity and gentleness whilst at the same time asserting her own independent political judgement. We saw in chapter 1 how Margaret used intermediary tropes to pre-empt criticism but her warnings here usually turn out to be true; her 'woman's fear' in fact often reveals her wisdom and prescience, as for example in her concern for Suffolk's safety.

In *2 Henry VI*, Margaret is easily able to identify her enemies, and to manoeuvre their deaths so as to protect her own power base. She says, '[t]his Gloucester should be quickly rid the world, | To rid us from the fear we have of him' (III.1.233-34). Lady Macbeth later takes the same care to mark out her enemies as those who might destroy her. The real question here is the extent to which her 'care' for her husband is true or 'performed', and much of that will depend upon the presentational and textual decisions that are made (which I will discuss shortly). Despite a general consensus that she is the villain of the piece, I think it is perfectly possible to see Margaret's solicitude for Henry and for her country as genuine.

I am no loathsome leper – look on me!

What? Art thou, like the adder, waxen deaf?

Be poisonous too and kill thy forlorn queen.

Why then queen Margaret was ne'er thy joy. (III.2.75-78)

After this plea to her husband, Margaret goes on to describe with exquisite pleasure a 'fair England' which would, however, bring her no joy if she lost the king's love. In referring to the poisonous serpent here, she prefigures York's famous attack on her unnaturalness in *3 Henry VI*, where he will describe her as 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide'; according to York she bears a disguised and monstrous nature (*3HVI*, I.4.137). Yet, of course, her nature is constant; unlike her husband, she never strays from the cause of maintaining her power and supporting her son's inheritance. She is

described in Part 2 as a 'hag of hell' (IV.1.79), and yet the naturalism and lyricism of her language, as quoted above, imply that we should mistrust a narrative that paints her only as malign.

*3 Henry VI* famously portrays a more bloodthirsty Margaret than *2 Henry VI*, yet even that play begins with a reminder of her feminine nature as she says to Henry:

Would I had died a maid  
And never seen thee, never borne thee son,  
Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father.  
Hath he deserved to lose his birthright thus?  
Hadst thou but loved him half so well as I,  
Or felt that pain which I did for him once,  
Or nourished him, as I did with my blood,  
Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,  
Rather than have made that savage Duke thine heir  
And disinherited thine only son. (I.1.216-25)

Here she draws deliberate attention to her status as wife and mother. Whilst decisions taken in performance will dictate the extent to which an audience would accept these concerns as genuine, nevertheless I think there is no convincing reason to question her love for her son. She responds to Henry's decision to disinherit her son with scorn, saying:

Had I been there, which am a silly woman,  
The soldiers should have tossed me on their pikes  
Before I would have granted to that act.  
But thou preferr'st thy life before thine honour. (*3HVI*, I.1.243-46)

The idea of distorted, or degraded, chivalric masculine honour runs through all three of these plays which allows Margaret to become the representation of responsible, or at least effective, leadership. She is forced to perform the role of protector of England, a doubly-gendered role: maternal in so far

as she must protect her son and England (her husband), and paternal in her care for his patrimony and honour and in her physical defence of it. In this we might read an echo of the common Elizabethan iconography of the queen's two bodies; we shall see later in chapter 4 how Elizabeth I is culturally inscribed both as mother *and* father of the nation.

Again and again we see evidence that Margaret is an actor in her own right. The controversy of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* lies less in her actions to safeguard her crown than in a decayed chivalric ideal espoused by a king who is unable and unwilling to govern. As Henry confesses, 'I'll leave my son my virtuous deeds behind, | And would my father had left me no more' (3*HVI*, II.2.49-50). By contrast, Margaret espouses a pragmatic governance which highlights Henry's inadequacy, she tells him: 'What cannot be avoided | 'Twere childish weakness to lament or fear' (V.4.37-38). I mentioned earlier that critics disagree over the extent of the plays' complicity in the misogyny of their characters as well as the real threat offered by gender division and female transgression. In *Engendering a Nation*, Rackin and Howard argue that 'Shakespeare's representation of Margaret makes her appear morally worse than she does in the sources'.<sup>38</sup> I have shown why I believe this statement to be inaccurate. Shakespeare's Margaret knows the importance of honour and nobility, faithfulness as well as warlike instinct, all traditionally male chivalric virtues, as I have discussed. When she later focuses on York's betrayal, asking how he broke 'his solemn oath', she highlights the code of justice and honour that he has violated and she concludes, 'you should not be king | Till our king Henry had shook hands with death' (I.4.100-102). York responds not by answering the charges against him, but by concocting a nightmarish vision of an Amazonian, deviant, highly sexualised female; allegations powerful primarily due to their sheer theatricality. Against York's vituperative 'she-wolf' and 'Amazonian trull', she uses simple, monosyllabic language, declaring, '[o]ff with his head and set it on York gates | So York may overlook the town of York' (I.4.179-80). Unlike her

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<sup>38</sup> Rackin and Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 72.

husband, she is a doer, not a talker (another resemblance to Lady Macbeth). In the context of this play, I think, this shows a political strength, not weakness.

In her refusal to show mildness or mercy and in her intransigence (itself a mark of consistency compared with the vacillation and fluidity that defines Henry), Margaret confirms the truth of York's accusation that whilst '[w]omen are soft, mild, pitiful and flexible', Margaret is 'stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless' (I.4.141-42). Yet this rigidity contrasts with the vision of tragic Margaret physically bent over the body of her son which shows her vulnerability and her femininity by recalling the figure of the *pieta*. Holding her dead son's body in her arms on stage, Margaret repeats his name over and over. Notwithstanding this final suggestion that Margaret's vulnerability is saintly, there is no unambiguous redemption through sacrifice; religious faith is itself an ambiguous force in the play because Henry's faith is presented as a dereliction of his duty and honour.

All three *Henry VI* plays ask what sustains the illusion of power: chivalry, brotherhood, honour? It becomes clear that Margaret understands the nature of kingship better than her husband, she asserts: 'To be a queen in bondage is more vile | Than is a slave in base servility | For princes should be free' (1*HVI*, V.3.133-35). In addressing Henry as England, Margaret thereby draws attention to his disability and inadequacy as king. The king himself does not understand that the social function of kingship sustains the illusion of power; he says, 'I am [king], in mind, and that's nought' (3*HVI*, III.1.60). But successful sovereignty is at least in part a matter of successful performance: it is not about state of mind. These plays therefore question the extent to which royal prerogative is an inalienable right irrespective of temperament. York describes Henry as 'surfeiting in joys of love | With his new bride and England's dear-bought queen'; Henry's love for his wife is blamed for the loss of France (2*HVI*, I.1.248-49). His uxoriousness is a betrayal of his royal dignity: his extreme passion for his wife, his passivity, his 'unmanly' sighs, his prayers, and most importantly, his lack of judgement – all these things subject him to ridicule.

That the king cannot tell good counsel from ill is also a sign of his mental weakness. Henry stands aside watching the dissolution of male bonds and doing nothing to contain it. I will, later, consider the Temple Garden dispute as a key example of Henry's loss of sovereign authority; there is no sense in which Henry can control or even limit the political machinations of his courtiers (his predicament is similar to King Arthur helplessly witnessing the unravelling of the Round Table). Henry refuses to intervene in the argument (he says, 'I care not which; | Or Somerset, or York, all's one to me') and his failure has devastating consequences both for him and for the realm. Problems of kingship may be expressed through the queen, York blames all the troubles of the realm on Margaret (he tells her 'hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept'), yet as we've seen before, we are witnessing a failure in manhood here, not womanhood (3*HVI*, II.2.160).

In conclusion, then, it is starting to become clear that what we are seeing in the three *Henry VI* plays is a portrait of a failure of sovereignty. Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays manifest disquiet at Margaret's militancy even *whilst* they create a portrait of an effective queen whose agency is focussed on upholding her husband's sovereignty. Like Malory, Shakespeare makes use of hostile historiography that portrays Margaret as an usurper of power, and yet he too allows glimpses of autonomous leadership in which she is effective and sovereign-like. We have seen that she is central to the organisation of plot and political structure in *Henry VI*. She is not merely a subverter of plot; she is its main agent. Notwithstanding this new understanding of Margaret, in section a) below, we shall see the extent to which her reputation has been negatively affected by the problematic editorial history of the *Henry VI* plays.

#### **a) Textual Instability**

In any discussion of the role of Margaret in the first tetralogy, we must consider the extent to which her portrayal changes between Folio and Quarto texts – or the Octavo text in the case of 3 *Henry VI*.



In this section I intend to ask what we might conclude about women's roles in general from those distinctions. Critical attitudes to the editing of dramatic texts have changed enormously in the past fifty years or so. In the 1950s, for the first time, critics started to draw attention to the staging and the theatrical history of dramatic texts, and the publication of J. L. Styan's influential work *The Shakespeare Revolution* in 1977 advanced the idea that performance is the key identifier of meaning in Shakespeare.<sup>39</sup> Styan's view rapidly became commonplace. The Oxford edition published in the mid-late eighties included edited texts which its editors considered closest to the performed texts of Shakespeare's day; the editors explained, 'we have devoted efforts to recovering and presenting texts of Shakespeare's plays *as they were acted* in the London playhouses' (my italics).<sup>40</sup> Their editions remained rooted in the belief that only live performance can unearth a set of meanings considered to be authorised by Shakespeare. A contrary view does emerge occasionally – R.A. Foakes argues that 'reading a play and seeing it acted are two different but equally valid and valuable experiences', however, the ideal of live performance continues to suffuse editorial theory.<sup>41</sup> W.B. Worthen recently argued that 'like a performance on the stage, an edition marks its historicity most clearly in its way of imagining the relationship between the past of the text and the present moment of its production'.<sup>42</sup> The troubled link between the editorial history and the intention to reproduce the actual moment of production becomes clear in the debate over the so-called bad

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<sup>39</sup> J. L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Styan accelerated the idea of performance as the central component of Shakespeare studies.

<sup>40</sup> John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Second Edition, ed. by John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. xv-xliii (p. xliii).

<sup>41</sup> R. A. Foakes, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R. A. Foakes, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 1-151, (p. 4).

<sup>42</sup> W. B. Worthen, 'Prefixing the Author: Print, Plays, and Performance' in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. by Barbara Hodgdon and W.B. Worthen (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), pp. 212-31 (p. 228).

quartos, which have been seen to represent performance texts re-constructed – albeit often in error – by the recollections of their players.<sup>43</sup>

The shorter texts are defended most famously by Lucas Erne, who argues in *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* that they reflect an oral, theatrical provenance because they were deliberately designed for performance on stage. Erne argues that Shakespeare would have actively supported publication of his playbooks because of greater readership for those plays that were printed than theatrical audiences alone, and he contrasts the literariness of Shakespeare's long texts with the theatricality of his short texts, arguing that the texts' 'respective distinctiveness allows us important insights into Shakespeare's theatrical *and* literary art'.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, Erne suggests, the folio texts are designed for print, for a reading audience, and he cites as proof their length, which would have been impossible to perform in the three hours or so on stage that contemporary sources describe.

Whether or not we agree with Erne, it will become clear in comparing them side-by-side, that the *Henry VI* plays are not stable *either* textually *or* theatrically. Crucially, textual distinctions reveal the relationship a contemporary audience would have had with Margaret; detailed examination of the F and the Q/O texts side-by-side enables us to see how portrayals of women differ, even to trace a pattern of changes between the two. The Q/O texts significantly predate the publication of the First Folio; I will show in this section that women's roles are substantially smaller in the earlier texts.<sup>45</sup>

Eleanor Cobham in 2 *Henry VI* Q makes a brief unexplained statement, saying to her husband, 'I'll come after you, for I cannot go before'. In F, by contrast, she says:

I cannot go before

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<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Laurie Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The 'Bad' Quartos and their Contexts* (Ottawa: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 338-39. Maguire insists that even if memorial reconstruction is 'a possibility ... even an attractive possibility, let us not mistake it for fact'. Maguire does not believe that the shorter texts represent a reliable, or stable, record of a play's performance history.

<sup>44</sup> Lucas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Geneva: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> '2 Henry VI', ed. by Matthew Dimmock, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, Third Edition, General Editor Stephen Greenblatt, Volume Editors Walter Cohen, Jean Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus, General textual editors Gordon McMullan and Suzanne Gossett (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Co, 2015): F in print and digital, Q digital only. Subsequent references are to this edition.

While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.

Were I a man, a Duke and next of blood,

I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks

And smooth my way upon their headless necks.

And, being a woman, I will not be slack

To play my part in Fortune's pageant. (I.2.61-67)

The depiction of her violent ambition and her desire to be manly in order to carry out a treasonous deed and put her husband on the throne, are both missing from Q. The addition clearly has a major impact on the audience's understanding of her character. Eleanor's motivation is power and she is clearly frustrated at her husband's lack of manliness. 'Being a woman', her ability to act is limited, but 'were I a man', she makes it clear how she would behave. In this there is implied criticism of her husband; here her role is to police manliness.

Eleanor's disgrace and punishment are very differently treated in Q and F. In F she is told that she shall 'after three days' open penance done | Live in your country here in banishment' (II.3.11-12). In Q, her fall is more theatrical and more heavily ritualised; the king tells her, 'thou shalt two days in London do penance barefoot in the streets with a white sheet about thy body and a wax taper burning in thy hand. That done, thou shalt be banished forever into the Isle of Man, there to end thy wretched days' (Q, II.3.5). The prose description sounds like a stage direction yet it insists upon a public and a visible disgrace that is missing from F. Eleanor takes a much more masculine role in F and yet in her disgrace she is also much more heroic. She says in F, 'my joy is death' (II.4.88); in Q she simply walks off in shame.

In *2 Henry VI* (Q), Henry gives his reaction to the fall of Gloucester; he says, '[m]y conscience tells me thou art innocent' (III.1.141). He has no view about Gloucester's guilt in F, so in his silence he becomes more complicit in Gloucester's fall. His later statement of regret at the fall of Gloucester is cut from twenty four lines in F down to a mere three in Q. Certainly Q distils the essence of F:

Margaret says of Gloucester in Q, 'in mine opinion it were good that he died' (III.1.113). By contrast, in F she says 'This Gloucester should be quickly rid the world, | To rid us of the fear we have of him' (III.1.233-4). But we can also make out a pattern of differences; in small and subtle ways the simpler structure of Q highlights her brutality, her lack of empathy and Henry's inability to withstand her. The F text shows why she wants Gloucester dead (to protect herself and hers), so her logic is more understandable. It highlights her honesty, her directness in the face of the chaos of courtiers and politicians who befuddle Henry with reassurances and flattery. In Q the king admonishes Margaret for her behaviour, criticism entirely absent from F: 'Believe me, my love, thou wert much to blame' (III.2.59-62). Therefore Q's king becomes a stronger, more assertive figure. Moreover, Q is missing the cynicism and contempt at both Henry's faith and his lack of chivalric ability, which are clearly present in the F text, as we see here:

His champions are the prophets and apostles,  
 His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,  
 His study is his tilt-yard and his loves  
 Are brazen images of canonised saints. (I.3.58-61)

Margaret's reaction to news of Gloucester's death is also illustrative of these textual distinctions. In F she says:

And for myself, foe as he was to me,  
 Might liquid tears, or heart-offending groans,  
 Or blood-consuming sighs recall his life,  
 I would be blind with weeping, sick with groans. (III.2.59-62)

In other words here she understands the language of grief, the ritual of mourning and lament, yet she refuses to perform it arbitrarily and hypocritically as her husband does. This passage is missing from Q. In the F text in her plainness of language, her refusal to conform to the political considerations of ritual and courtliness, she is no hypocrite (again clearly a forerunner to Lady

Macbeth in her determination to match word and deed). The only time when Margaret allows herself a personal, emotional response is in her lament for Suffolk after his death. The passage addressed to Suffolk which in F runs to fifty lines, ending 'in thy place perish Margaret', is a meagre six lines in the Q text. In both texts she enters the stage with Suffolk's head but in Q she is virtually silent in her grief. There are many other subtle distinctions that radically affect meaning: towards the end of *2 Henry VI*, Henry receives news of York's invasion from Ireland; his words in both texts, '[t]hus stands my state, 'twixt Cade and York distressed', contain the essence of his helplessness (IV.9.31). In F, though, he suggests 'come, wife, let's in, and learn to govern better', not the most regal of statements nor one likely to inspire confidence while in Q he is completely silent (IV.9.47). Meanwhile in F, Margaret takes charge and lays out their tactics, announcing '[w]e shall to London get, where you are loved' (V.2.81). She has absolutely no role in the equivalent scene in the Q text.

In *3 Henry VI*, a similar pattern holds true, albeit to a slightly lesser extent. Differences between F and O are small but still often significant. In the F text Northumberland refers to the king as 'unkingly', whilst in O he uses the word 'unmanly' instead. Of course, it is worth bearing in mind that differences might be non-deliberate; memorial mistakes or typesetting errors, but the distinction between unmanly and unkingly does suggest that O contains a more absolute and irreversible erosion in the king's personal standing. York refers to the queen at the start of *3 Henry VI* in F, saying, '[t]he Queen this day here holds her parliament, | But little thinks we shall be of her council', but in O there is no reference to her by York at all (I.1.35-36). That Margaret ignores the processes of parliament in O has the effect of de-emphasising her legitimacy as well as reducing evidence of her support base. O gives more detailed description of the queen as martial; she says,

Had I been there,

The soldiers should have tossed me on their lances' point

Before I would have granted to their wills

[...]

I here divorce me, Henry, from thy bed

Until that act of Parliament be recalled

Wherein thou yieldest to the house of York. (Scene 1, lines 205-13; 211-13)

The F text moves this passage later in the scene and, in so doing, focuses attention less on her martial and political response to her enemy and more on her personal and emotional involvement, her husband's breach of his familial loyalty and his betrayal of his own bloodline. This is clear in the followings words addressed to Henry:

Hadst thou but loved him half so well as I,

Or felt that pain which I did for him once,

Or nourished him, as I did with my blood,

Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,

Rather than have made that savage Duke thine heir

And disinherited thine only son. (I.1.220-25)

In F, Prince Edward joins with his mother in condemnation of his father's actions which adds to the severity of the criticism.

As I have shown, the F text repeatedly renders Henry more useless, incapable, and significantly more isolated. So, we might conclude, the key distinction between the two extant texts of *3 Henry VI* rests in the portrayal of Henry. Henry's extended monologue on the nature of kingship ('O God methinks it were a happy life | To be no better than homely swain, to sit upon a hill as I do now') runs to 50 lines in F, compared with just 13 in O (Scene 9, lines 1-13). The distinctions are clear: in F he concludes, 'would I have never reigned, nor ne'er been king', compared with O which ends 'would God that I were dead, so all were well' (Scene 9, line 11). In other words, one text portrays a nihilistic wish to efface his entire being whilst the other shows a simplistic desire for the chaos and misery of his life to be over. F shows a realisation that he has not much to live for, that as a man he has failed, whilst O shows him totally abrogating responsibility for his predicament. The

inversion of social order inherent in the king's description of himself as homely swain is echoed in the immediately following scene with its killing of son by father, father by son. Suddenly Henry's glib statements about a desire for death become realised in the human tragedy of that scene and in its vision of dynastic failure. In F, the king compares himself to Priam, a comparison which highlights his lack of heroic stature and miserable self-pity; he tells this man who has unwittingly killed his own son, '[he]re sits a king more woeful than you are' (II.5.124). In O, Henry's inadequacy is less obvious: at least in that text Henry allows the father to 'suffer' equally: he tells him 'here sits a king *as* woe-began *as* thee' (*my italics*) (Scene 9, line 55). At precisely the moment when his allies are growing in power, Henry hands over his crown again; both texts have him relinquish authority alongside his crown, he tells the keeper: 'Go where you will, the king shall be commanded; | And be you kings: command and I'll obey' (F, III.1.91-92). By comparison, Margaret's final campaign speech in F describes her as a pilot, a herder of men, detailing her strength in resisting the attack of her enemies, and it ends on a note of practical leadership and common sense, which is clear in her words: 'What cannot be avoided | 'Twere childish weakness to lament or fear' (V.4.38-39). This compares favourably to Henry's lament for his own predicament, and his blind belief that in some way his condition is tragic, unconnected to his own deficiencies – although it is also worth noting that Margaret's speech is reduced from 38 lines in the F text to just 11 in the O.

In discussing the editorial controversies that continue to dominate discussions of *Henry VI* parts 1, 2 and 3, I have shown how notionally marginal changes in language, order and focus have a disproportionate impact on our understanding of the play (this is especially the case if we accept Erne's disputed view that the Q/O is a likely reflection of what audiences would have seen at early performances). What we've seen in this section is the extent to which the complex editorial history of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* has affected our understanding of the figure of Margaret (and Henry) in the first tetralogy. The differences between the principal early versions of these two plays – Q (2 *Henry VI*) and O (3 *Henry VI*) as compared with the Folio's version of each – have a disproportionate impact on

its female roles; Margaret's longest or most emphatic speeches are drastically cut in the shorter, 'performed', texts, Q and O. In general, too, the Q/O texts increase Henry's uselessness even whilst they reduce Margaret's practical role.

*Henry VI* takes a prominent role in critical debates over Shakespearian performance and the critical history of these plays, arguably more than any other in the Shakespearian canon, has become inextricably linked with, and even defined by, their performance histories.<sup>46</sup> *Piers Penniless*, a defence of theatre written in 1592 by Shakespeare's contemporary, the dramatist Thomas Nashe, contains a description of a version of Talbot on stage, seen by 'ten thousand spectators at least'.<sup>47</sup> Nashe's comments imply that the play was highly popular. It is possible that he refers to an entirely different, lost, version of the play, but the assumption that his description refers to Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI* is supported by an entry in Henslowe's diary which details a performance of 'harey the vj the 3 of marche 1592', with the abbreviation 'ne', meaning 'new'.<sup>48</sup> Henslowe lists seventeen repeat performances of this play between March 1592 and January 1593 which points to very high audience demand.

Although there are only a handful of eyewitness accounts of public theatre performances in the period, the play was performed at the Rose Theatre in Southwark, just across the river from the City of London. In the 1580s and 1590s Southwark was a neighbourhood full of traders, merchants and immigrants, and it had a reputation for lawlessness, prostitution and political dissent. Records show that servants, craftsmen, apprentices, students, nobles, ambassadors all attended both the

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<sup>46</sup> More recently, the Tillyardian, conservative critical analysis of the 1960s was institutionalised by John Barton and Peter Hall's famous production of *The Wars of the Roses* and it cast a long shadow over all subsequent productions, even up to the present day. In his work on Shakespeare's early histories in performance, *Representing Shakespeare: England History and the RSC*, Robert Shaughnessy argues that 'the stage history of these plays tends to demonstrate that male directors looking for cuts still find the women's roles the most tempting, and female parts which are already prone to marginalisation and stereotyping are often simplified still further' (p. 81); Shaughnessy's argument is certainly borne out with respect to the *Henry VI* plays.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Piers Penniless' Supplication to the Devil*, ed. by J.P. Collier (London: reprinted for the Shakespeare Society, 1842), p. 60. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>48</sup> John Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. by R. A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. xxix-xxx.



Rose and the Globe (which opened in 1599); working classes attended in large numbers. These outdoor playhouses saw courtly, elite and popular audiences mixed together, although the playhouse itself was configured in hierarchical manner with seats in galleries more expensive, and poorer spectators standing in the yard. Unlike Jonson's masques, which, as we shall see later, were intended to celebrate and flatter their aristocratic audiences, for the most part, Shakespeare's plays met with a highly heterogeneous audience; mixed genders, classes and ages.

The popularity of his history plays, and their prominence in English cultural discourse has enshrined Shakespeare as the most significant creator of English heroic history and the founder of an English myth of origins; he has profoundly affected our sense of English history even despite enormous historical inaccuracies. In section II, I will consider the ways in which Shakespeare's creation of a mythic history intertwines with and expands upon its varied textual sources. Stephen Lynch has suggested that Shakespeare's plays are 'interventions in pre-existent fields of textuality. The old notion of particular and distinct sources has given way to new notions of boundless and heterogeneous intertextuality'.<sup>49</sup> I will now discuss some of those elements of intertextuality to identify what pre-existing conditions inform Shakespeare's earliest history plays and to ask how their medieval literary heritage informs our reading of these plays. I will demonstrate that deviations and echoes from Shakespeare's sources provide invaluable information about his dramatic technique; I will propose that we may use them to cast light on his presentation of a decaying chivalric world and in particular of female autonomy and agency in these three plays.

## II The Politics of Medievalism in the *Henry VI* plays

Often seen by critics as anachronistic, flawed and simplistic, Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays actually belong to a sophisticated tradition of historiography that is fascinated with Margaret of Anjou in

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen J. Lynch, *Shakespearean Intertextuality: Studies in Selected Sources and Plays* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 86.

particular, and women, in general, with power, re-playing and refining their viciousness, their ambition, and their hubris. I have shown in chapter 1 that there is some contemporary historiography which is supportive of her efforts; Margaret is described by Polydore Vergil as ‘very desirous of renown, full of policie, counsell, comely behaviour, and all manly qualities’, but he goes on to describe ‘haute corage which was above the nature of her sex’.<sup>50</sup> Hall adds ‘in stomacke and courage (she was) more lyke to a man than a woman’, he describes ‘other giftes and talentes of nature, belonging to a man, full and flowyng’, and how she is prepared to ‘plucke the sword of auctoritie out of their handes’.<sup>51</sup> Depictions of Margaret as manly in Shakespeare’s plays tend to focus on her martial abilities; she is described wryly as ‘Captain Margaret’, and Richard of Gloucester notes sneeringly that ‘[a] woman’s General. What should we fear?’ (3*HV*, II.6.75; I.2.67). Her martial instincts also render her ‘Amazonian’, an identity that is specifically associated with a world in which masculine authority does not exist. Although Holinshed removes Hall’s references to her acting like a man, Shakespeare does not – which arguably suggests that Shakespeare, unlike Holinshed, felt that he had sufficiently distanced his criticism of Margaret from any potentially subversive comments about the ruling queen Elizabeth.

In section I, I showed how Margaret is central to the organisation of plot and political structure in *Henry VI*. In section II, I will explore how these plays’ treatment of women links them directly to the medieval romance genre and also to the historiographic tradition from which Shakespeare draws his material. In my introduction I suggested that scholarship has only just begun to acknowledge and explore Shakespeare’s debts to medieval cultural tradition, medieval romance in particular. Here, I shall show that those scenes in *Henry VI* which are most indebted to medieval romance are precisely the scenes that do *not* appear amongst Shakespeare’s sources and yet – despite the usual critical tendency to pay attention to Shakespearean innovation – they tend to be ignored by critics and directors alike.

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<sup>50</sup> *Three Books of Polydore Vergil*, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> *Hall’s Chronicle*, p. 208; p. 234.

In *3 Henry VI*, Clifford tells the king: 'I would your highness would depart the field. | The Queen hath best success when you are absent' (II.2.73-74). If we directly compare his words with those reported by Grafton in his description of the second battle of St Albans, we see they are very similar. Grafton noted that 'happy was the quene in her two battayls, but unfortunate was the kyng in all his enterprises, for where his person was present, ther victory fled euer from him to the other parte, and he commonly was subdued and vanquished'.<sup>52</sup> In both texts, it is clear that the king is a hindrance to military endeavour. A king who has to leave the field in order to secure success represents the inversion of chivalric codes of behaviour, ridiculous in his inadequacy. Tillyard argued that Shakespeare took much of the providential treatment of war and military honour from his sources; that Shakespeare, like his chronicler sources, accepts that a righteous king would secure a glorious military victory.<sup>53</sup> In fact, though, in these plays the whole chivalric model of kingship is decayed; Henry V's hearse lies on stage at the start of *1 Henry VI*, several observers imply that the ideals of kingship have died with him.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, his son Henry VI is an anti-king in that he will deliberately cast off power, as we see in his words below:

Methinks it were a happy life

To be no better than a homely swain,

To sit upon a hill, as I do now,

To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,

Thereby to see the minutes how they run. (*3HVI*, II.5.21-25)

Even worse, Henry hands power to his wife. As I have shown by way of comparison with *Hall's Chronicle*, Shakespeare directly absorbs from his sources a concern about the emasculating effect of Henry's abrogation of power as well as concern about waning chivalric virtues represented by an idealised medieval past.

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<sup>52</sup> *Grafton's Chronicle*, p. 672.

<sup>53</sup> Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 159.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, comments by Exeter and Winchester in *1 Henry VI*, I.1.18-28.

The courtliness of its scenes as well as the breakdown of the chivalric model in *Henry VI* echo the disintegration of the Round Table in *Morte Darthur*; both these texts portray a king who fails to hold together male bonds and maintain social and political order. The critic Paul Dean has argued that in fact the entire tetralogy is explained by Shakespeare's indebtedness to romance history.<sup>55</sup> In the three *Henry VI* plays there is a focus on traditional tropes of romance: courtship, adultery, brotherhood and magic (and there is a 'fair unknown' parallel in the incident of father and son accidentally slaughtering each other). Other thematic links with medieval romance such as the supernatural, pageantry, ritual and literary techniques such as alliteration and interlace recur throughout these plays. Dean traces the theme of romance through various interludes: the early garden scene which focuses on inheritance and fatherhood, the devils and the demonic, and the lowbrow scenes of Cade and Joan. I shall show that the three plays are structured around key moments in which romance and the idealised past (for example, the courtship scene between Suffolk and Margaret) crosses over with chronicle narrative and the disappointing reality of the present (such as the deaths of Talbot and Gloucester).

These plays present a ritualised treatment of femininity, most obviously in the portrayal of Margaret as adulteress and Joan of Arc as witch; although its female characters are often concerned with challenging those forms. If we look first at Joan, we see that her need for demonic assistance demonstrates that she is breaching natural order. Her demons *are* real; they are not a manifestation of a psychological condition because they are seen by others – the stage direction reads *Enter Fiends*. Unlike in *Dr Faustus* or *Macbeth*, devils and the demonic are not particularly tempting or fearful here. Magic is never taken entirely seriously and witchcraft has an explicitly political function; in 2 *Henry VI* for instance it becomes a 'trick' to fool the Duchess of Gloucester and discredit her husband. Joan's success on the battlefield had been specifically described in Shakespeare's sources

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<sup>55</sup> Paul Dean, 'Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Trilogy and Elizabethan "Romance" Histories: The Origins of a Genre', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33.1 (Spring, 1982), 34-48 (p. 36).

as demonic; Hall refers to 'this wytych or manly woman'.<sup>56</sup> In *1 Henry VI*, Talbot tells Joan 'thou art a witch' and accuses her of being the 'devil's dam' (I.5.6,5). Joan's sexual laxity, lack of humility, arrogance, the unnatural rejection of her father: these are all taken to manifest an unnaturalness, a corruption of natural order. The spirits nevertheless desert her and she capitulates at the end, acknowledging that hell is 'too strong ... to buckle with' (V.2.49). Joan is a figure with no real moral compass and no sense of chivalric purpose or honour, she acts on instinct, and out of self-interest; she is presented as the opposite of Talbot with his rigorous and disciplined martial principles. Nevertheless, Joan exemplifies the romance conception of a low-born subject achieving greatness, heroism, and power, the 'fair-unknown' who achieves fame despite, not because of, her birth.

Joan, unlike Talbot, represents a 'modern' diplomacy; she uses deception and she deploys her feminine guiles to influence her superiors; Alençon describes her 'fair persuasions mixed with sugared words' (III.3.18). She calls on men's nationalistic instincts to support her military campaign but ultimately her mission is power for her own account. She defends herself in Act 5 by attacking her accusers:

I never had to do with wicked spirits;  
 But you, that are polluted with your lusts,  
 Stained with the guiltless blood of innocents,  
 Corrupt and tainted with a thousand vices,  
 Because you want the grace that others have,  
 You judge it straight a thing impossible  
 To compass wonders but by help of devils. (*1HVI*, V.3.42-48)

Despite her compelling words, we know that she *has* called on supernatural assistance. She goes on to talk of herself as 'a virgin from her tender infancy, | Chaste and immaculate in very thought' and yet she contradicts this assertion a few lines later by claiming to be pregnant, although she is unable

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<sup>56</sup> *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 157.

to identify which of her many lovers is the father (V.3.50-51). Guenevere is described at the end of *Morte Darthur* as 'vertuous', and Joan sees herself as 'virtuous and holy' (V.3.40). Joan sets out to portray herself as a figure of courtly 'worshyp' and yet she betrays those very notions of courtliness and chivalry.

In *Puzzling Shakespeare*, Leah Marcus suggests that the burning of Joan 'carries strong elements of much older forms of ritual immolation for the annihilation of public menace'.<sup>57</sup> She argues that public burning of transgressive women is already a ritualised punishment by the time of Shakespeare's play. In *Morte Darthur*, for instance, Guenevere is faced with a 'grete fyre made aboute an iron stake' (7.618) and her fate is specifically described as fixed irrespective of degree, 'for favoure, love, nother affinite, there sholde be none other by ryghtuous jugemente' (7.618). Repeated near-burning of Guenevere highlights an intransigent justice that calls for public punishment regardless of guilt. I argued in chapter 1 that Lancelot showing up at the last minute confirms the sense of Guenevere as isolated and lacking a support base, which added a precariousness, a tension, to her plight. Malory highlights the solitude of his queen as well as the ritualised aspect of her fall from grace; several critics have pointed out that the burning imagery of the *Morte* would bring to contemporary readers' mind the death of Joan of Arc.<sup>58</sup>

Margaret and Joan are explicitly connected in contemporary sources, too; Patricia-Ann Lee reports a speech by Margaret of Anjou in Pope Pius II's *Commentaries* in Latin in which Margaret lays claim to Joan's military strength and heroism, saying, 'I have mowed down ranks far more stubborn than theirs are now. You who once followed a peasant girl, follow now a queen .... I will either conquer or be conquered with you'. Pius reports that her audience 'all marveled, and [...] said that the spirit of the Maid, who had raised Charles (VII of France) to the throne, was renewed'.<sup>59</sup> The ritual of burning shows the rule of law subsumed and subverted by tradition and superstition. A

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<sup>57</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 90.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Astell's *Political Allegory*, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup> *Commentaries of Pius II*, Book IX, p. 580.

symbolic connection between these three women is suggested by the near-burning of the transgressive Guenevere, the defiance and resilience of her counterpart, queen Margaret, and the burning of the heretic and witch Joan. In other words, the image of burning directly connects the figure of the witch with the figure of the queen.

An idea of fire as cleansing and as a source of renewal is present from the outset of *1 Henry VI* when Bedford talks of '[b]onfires in France ... | To keepe our great Saint Georges feast withal' (*1HVI*, I.1.153-54). At the very start of the play, Bedford and his fellow warriors leave the fires burning in England to head to France to defend the territories annexed by Henry V. The burning of Joan marks the final completion of that desire to renew and celebrate the figure of St George and English victory under Bedford's watch. In a sense, the burning of Joan becomes part of a patriotic English mythic glory, the final part of English ascent to domination. The burning of Joan takes on a symbolic function: it represents English aspiration and supremacy over an archaic (Catholic) past. Yet this moment of victory over its great military foe also marks an emerging vulnerability: like the chivalry of Talbot its last great warrior, the England of St George with its 'bonfires in France' will prove transient and illusory.

The critic Edward I. Berry suggests that Talbot in *1 Henry VI* is the spokesman for the sacramental, ceremonial view of life central to feudalism, and also the chief casualty of its failure.<sup>60</sup> In other words, he represents a nostalgic rendering of mythic chivalry, one which represents both the pinnacle of national glory but also the moment of its decline. The Countess of Auvergne refers to Talbot as anti-heroic, a mere shadow of more glorious mythic men, she says,

I thought I should have seen some Hercules.

A second Hector [...]

Alas, this is a child, a silly dwarf:

It cannot be this weak and writhled shrimp

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<sup>60</sup> Edward I. Berry, *Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Press of Virginia, 1975), pp. 1-28.

Should strike such terror to his enemies. (1HVI, II.3.18-23)

We might read the figure of Talbot as representing a fading, archaic chivalric principle that is increasingly threatened by the new order; a new order that enables the low born to rise up, modern warfare to subvert traditional bravery, women to 'act' as men, and other breaches in the natural order of things. So the decline of Talbot represents the failure of the chivalric masculine ideal. That ideal is punctured temporarily by the Countess, who declares him weak and child-like, but it is then permanently destroyed because he dies without an heir. Talbot's bizarre encounter with the Countess of Auvergne has a mythic quality, which further connects this play with *Morte Darthur*. The scene is an extraordinary one, and critics have struggled to know what to make of it. The fact that the Countess is so effective at puncturing the glamour of the great chivalric hero is very significant; 'a weak and writhled shrimp' is a pretty damning description of a hero seen by Thomas Nashe (amongst others) as the moral descendent of Henry V.<sup>61</sup> Her description renders him weak and threatens his masculinity. He is no man; he is a child, a dwarf: the very act of comparing him with Hercules punctures his warrior-like reputation and casts him as a figure of ridicule.

In the prior scene, Talbot had agreed to go and see the Countess in order that she may 'boast that she hath beheld the man | Whose glory fills the world with loud report' (1HVI, II.2.42-43). Since that is not the priority of the warrior, his behaviour fits better with the idealised courtesy to ladies of earlier romances. We might compare it, for example, to Lancelot's frequent examples of service to ladies, or Gareth's courtesy to Lyonet even though she spurns and scolds him repeatedly.<sup>62</sup> From the outset, the lady's words conceal a desire for conquest. She has laid a plot for Talbot, as she tells her porter: 'The plot is laid. If all things fall out right | I shall as famous be by this exploit | As Scythian Tomyris by Cyrus' death' (II.3.4-6). Joan and Margaret are both described as female Worthies (they build their own heroic and immortal fame) and the Countess of Auvergne here

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<sup>61</sup> Nashe, *Piers Penniless*, p. 60.

<sup>62</sup> For example see chapter 4, 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney that was called Bewmaynes' in *Morte Darthur*.



compares herself to another, Tomyris, who was one of the nine female Worthies famous for avenging the death of her son by defeating the Persian King Cyrus in battle. Whilst she aspires to military greatness, yet her plot is small and private; she literally aims to use the walls of her castle to enclose him (as Morgana traps Lancelot and seduces him in Book III of *Morte Darthur*).<sup>63</sup> She aims to take Talbot by subterfuge, not by force of arms, saying, 'great is the rumour of this dreadful knight' (II.3.7); so 'dreadful' is he, she implies, that he cannot be taken except by deception. Yet when Talbot is presented to her, she claims to be astonished by his appearance: 'I see report is fabulous and false', she observes wryly (II.3.17). Has she really been fooled by the report of the man, or is she deliberately undermining him by highlighting the mismatch between the real man and the reputed warrior? She later comments: 'Long time thy shadow hath been in thrall to me; | For in my gallery thy picture hangs' (II.3.35-36). So she *did* know what he looks like; her rhetoric is false, deliberately designed to humiliate him.

Talbot is compared to Hector and Hercules, yet he is also seen as a 'weak and writhled shrimp'; an innuendo based on his meagre, flaccid appearance. Although the Countess seeks to diminish him with her words, he refuses to rise to the bait; no posturing, defences or assertion of glory, just a simple response: 'Talbot's here'. Talbot deliberately lays claim to his humble physique and in suggesting that he will leave so as to spare her further disappointment he exemplifies exactly the nobility that made him famous in the first place. Moreover, he specifically rejects the individualism that defines his enemy Joan, asserting that the greater part of him lies in his army, his brethren on the battlefield. Talbot is described as 'the trust of England's honour' (IV.3.73); an assertion of power cited in a fellowship of arms. By contrast, in *Morte Darthur*, Arthur famously lamented the failure of these male bonds, when he laments 'now have I loste the fayryst felyshyp of noble knyghtes that ever hylde Chrysten kynge togydirs' (8.685). Here, though, Talbot's men lie in wait to relieve him from the Countess' trap. In arguing that what she sees is 'but the smallest part

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<sup>63</sup> *Morte Darthur*, p. 151.

and least proportion of humanity', he shows her that an individual man is weak and humble, but the bonds between his men, the bonds of brotherhood forged by military campaigns are his reality; they give him substance (II.3.51-52). Talbot absorbs the Countess' description of his nature and re-forms it. In front of her he is indeed weak, a 'shadow' of his greater self, because his greater self is contingent on social and military bonds, in other words on the substance and strength of his men at arms. And the Countess instantly recognises the code of arms he lives by as she immediately capitulates; 'pardon my abuse', she concedes, 'I find thou art no less than fame hath bruited, | And more than may be gathered by thy shape' (II.3.66-68). It is when that male community fails that Talbot becomes vulnerable for the first time, leading to his death; he dies abandoned by his allies, waiting for military support that never arrives, the bonds of nobility and noblemen shattered forever.

The deception of chivalric heroes is a theme that runs throughout medieval romance as we see in Malory's *Morte Darthur* (and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, amongst others), in which both Arthur and Lancelot find themselves the victims of plots by vengeful women (3.168). Like those knights, Talbot maintains respect and a sense of honour when speaking to the Countess; she is his enemy and yet he is calm and polite, courteous above all things, although he warns her, '[b]e not dismayed, fair lady, nor misconster | The mind of Talbot as you did mistake | The outward composition of his body' (II.3.72-74). The scene is neatly resolved with ritualised repast and reunion; she serves him and the scene is peaceably resolved. She acknowledges that she behaved inappropriately – 'I did not entertain thee as thou art' – and that she broke rules of hospitality and courtesy by failing to treat him as his due (II.3.71). Yet she is still his enemy; he seeks to raze her country and her people and her final capitulation does not represent affection, merely acceptance. The influence of romance is clear in this episode: the unknown woman who lays an unseen plot, his premonition of treachery, the sudden appearance of his men, the revelation of Talbot's power (transformed from 'shrimp' to warrior). All these elements highlight the mythic nature of Talbot's

chivalric code. That code that will die out over the course of the play as it is replaced by the duplicity of Joan and her villainous soldiers.

Shakespeare fabricates the Countess scene to show the value, and also the vulnerability, of courtly behaviour. The code of behaviour for which Talbot is recognised here belongs more to the romances of an earlier time, a deliberately archaic and idealised sense of nobility and honour which contrasts totally with the vanity and self-interest of the next scene. Talbot wanders into the lair of the strange lady – whom we don't know, whom we will never know – and because of his inherently virtuous nature he survives the temptation. Not coincidentally, the scene is followed immediately by the Temple Garden scene which represents the beginning of factionalism and discord amongst the nobility. This scene offers a portrait of an anti-Talbot, the fragmentation of those male bonds which had secured his victory and conquest. The enclosed garden location in medieval romance carries a range of symbolic values. It can be Edenic, a place of erotic self-absorption, repose, or, in Emilia's case in *The Knight's Tale* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, it is a place whose serenity and seclusion is illusory. It can also be sinister, unnatural; it exists on the edge of normal social mores. Arlyn Diamond has described how in romances gardens operate as 'socially constructed spaces which allow an official yet sanctioned breaking of the official rules'.<sup>64</sup> Shakespeare's Temple Garden scene certainly operates on the fringes of normal political discourse; the real bartering for power begins outside of the court. The scene begins with an unknown argument. The dispute itself is not important, what *is* important is the assertion of allegiance and affinity that it necessitates because what we are actually witnessing is the moment of factional disintegration.

Suffolk, an ambitious courtier and anti-Talbot, assumes the law to be random and interchangeable: he views the legal system as having been built to serve the private will of the ruling class, not merely to arbitrate disputes. He says: 'I have been a truant in the law | And never yet

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<sup>64</sup> Arlyn Diamond, 'Meeting Grounds: Gardens in Medieval Romance' in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. by Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjevic and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 125-138 (p. 138). For more on the subject, see Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and the Seasons of the Medieval World* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1973).

could frame my will to it, | And therefore frame the law unto my will' (II.4.7-9). We see here that he attempts to individualise the law, to manipulate it, and to assert individual supremacy over it. As the rule of law starts to fail more broadly, the body politic starts to unravel. Performance decisions can affect our understanding of this episode: the text suggests the meeting takes place late morning because they retire in to midday meal at the end, although Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company staged the scene in the evening with its participants staggering, dishevelled, out of their evening meal to the garden, drunkenly escalating into conflict.<sup>65</sup> In that performance men's decisions about justice and allegiance are compromised by a total lack of judgement due to their drunkenness; their dispute becomes even more meaningless and arbitrary as a result. In short, the scene shows clearly the fragility of male connections and the arbitrariness of male allegiances which lead to factional dissent and political collapse.

The Temple Garden scene is highly theatrical, dominated by the contrast between the red rose and the white; the physical gesture of plucking the rose is a symbolic representation of a political stance. The rose becomes a powerful public ritual of allegiance; in choosing the red rose or the white, each man is, in actual fact, making a formal (and public) political statement. Whilst York tells his audience: 'If he supposes that I have pleaded truth | From off this briar pluck a white rose with me' (II.4.29-30). Somerset responds with an almost exactly mirroring statement: 'Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer, | But dare maintain the party of the truth, | Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me' (II.4.31-33). The entire scene represents a contest in which both sides are matched evenly. And yet there are signs of confusion: Vernon, in seeking to halt the escalation of conflict, announces 'I love no colours', yet his desire to avoid taking sides lasts for only one line because he then concludes: 'I pluck this white rose with Plantagenet' (II.4.36). There is a clear arbitrariness at work in decisions of allegiance; whilst these rituals of allegiance are theatrical and

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<sup>65</sup> Described by Cox and Rasmussen in their introduction to *3 Henry VI*, p. 186.

arbitrary, we are also reminded that the actual implications of those decisions are serious and bloody.

The scene is theatrical because it focuses on performance, on external signifiers of loyalty; it is not enough to serve, it must be a *publicly* visible service. This scene of knights gathered round to select the banner under which they will fight is a deliberately archaised version of the public theatre of politics and warfare. In *Morte Darthur* Gawayne comments 'so God me helpe, these were two knyghtes that bare two whyght shyldys, but one of them bare a rede sleve uppon hys hede, and sertynly he was the beste knyght that ever y saw juste in fylde' (7.630). The chivalric glamour of knightly combat is represented by their tokens of allegiance and service to women; it's designed for an audience. There are many examples in the *Morte* which signify the theatricality of reconciliation ceremonies and statements of service; the symbolism is pictorial in tone, as are Somerset's words in *1 Henry VI*: 'Know us by these colours for thy foes' (II.4.105). Statements of allegiance and of enmity have the effect of breaking down the bonds between men even whilst they secure new affinities defined by service to a new faction. Again there are echoes of *Morte Darthur* here, for example, in the passage below, which shows the speed of the dissolution of male bonds and the descent into factionalism:

Whan sir Bors de Ganys, sir Ector de Marys and sir Lyonell harde thys outecry they called unto them sir Palomydes and sir Lavayne an sir Urre wyth many mo knyghtes or their bloode, and all they wente unto sir Launcelot and seyde thus: 'My lorde, wyte you well we have grete scorne of the grete rebukis that we have herde sir Gawayne say unto you: wherefore we pray you and charge you as ye woll have oure servyse. (8.690)

The fragmentation of the national political structure and the shattering of the male community will reverberate over the course of *Henry VI*.

By considering the Temple Garden episode alongside aspects of *Morte Darthur* above, I have shown that there is a deliberate medievalism operating in the scene; moreover that its archaism

operates, as do the roses that dominate it, as a signifier of meaning. In her recent work on the subject of archaic style in early modern literature, Lucy Munro suggests that 'archaism is propelled by a preoccupation not only with the old but also with the new, and by a younger generation's sense of its own innovation'. She argues that archaism is produced by 'diachronic and synchronic relationships between and within generations'.<sup>66</sup> Munro sees archaism as enabling resurrection and renovation in literary terms, as well as integration with older forms. In other words, older literary forms can be deliberately used to highlight the modernity, the contemporariness, of what is presented. In *1 Henry VI* in particular, Shakespeare becomes more obviously 'medieval' than his sources; the instability of historical period is *more* apparent in his recreation and reinvention of history than in his sources. Shakespeare's nostalgic recreation of the romance form appropriates a version of the past to enable safe political commentary; distancing through use of archaism provides a safe way to expose and evade potentially dangerous contemporary resonances in the late sixteenth-century. It also offers a vision of a lost heroic past; a time of heroes faltering in the face of an emergent individualism which fractures social structures. The great warriors of Arthurian legend are subsumed by the larger societal impact of the decline and fracture of the Round Table; an apt analogy for the splintering familial and political allegiances that defined the Wars of the Roses.

As with the Temple Garden and Countess of Auvergne scenes, the courtship scene between Suffolk and Margaret is new to Shakespeare; it does not appear in any of his usual sources. The scene in which York finally defeats Joan is the scene which introduces Margaret to the audience; the introduction of Margaret is framed by the scene of Joan's capture (before), and the scene of Joan's death (after). In this respect, the introduction of Margaret might be seen as a warning about the subversive power of women: as one falls another rises to take her place. The meeting of Suffolk and Margaret has been described by the critic Thomas H. McNeal as 'sentimental claptrap out of metrical

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<sup>66</sup> Lucy Munro, *Archaic Style in English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 142; p. 139.

romance, carrying on at the moment in fashionable pamphlets and romantic comedies'.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, I think the romance interlude fulfils an important purpose. It segregates the world of court and politics from the scenes of war and conquest; Margaret represents yet another asset intended to be annexed by an English court, and yet she remains threateningly foreign and elusive.

Suffolk mimics traditional courtly love verse: he speaks in terms of conquest by her 'princely majesty', but in fact conquest is *his* aim, not hers. It is not surprising that she is so bemused by his wooing efforts; she actually believes for a while that he is mad. Their lines interlace, which has the effect of drawing them together in private intimacy, yet their words are unrelated as are their thoughts. The meeting *looks* like a romance episode, yet it portrays an ominous failure to connect with one another. Suffolk's language changes during this scene with Margaret; he uses alliteration ('fairest beauty, do not fear nor fly'), repetition and chiasmus ('an earl I am, and Suffolk am I called'), and rhyme, for example, in the following lines; '[a]s plays the sun upon the glassy streams | Twinkling another counterfeited beam' (V.2.83-84). His language itself has become more contrived; it is a pastiche of courtly lyric and Petrarchan allegory as seen in his suggestion that he has become her prisoner and his claim that he cannot address her directly, he must do so via pen and paper.

All the while, the lady who has conquered him has no knowledge of that as she brusquely acknowledges, 'I perceive I am thy prisoner' (V.2.95). Love at this point is entirely one-sided, the courtly love of a courtier for his lady; there is no hint of impropriety in her behaviour. They are speaking in this scene, but not to each other; it is a staccato, stilted scene which moves swiftly between Suffolk and Margaret. They talk mainly to themselves, highlighting the difficulty of creating real personal connection as well as the distancing effect of courtly verse. Suffolk says to himself: 'She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed | She is a woman, therefore to be won' (V.2.99-100). He calls our attention here both to the artificial nature of his seduction and her usefulness to him. In the wooing scene, the lady herself has very limited active involvement. She describes, 'I were best to

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas H. McNeal, 'Margaret of Anjou: Romantic Princess and Troubled Queen', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 9.1 (Winter 1958), 1-10 (p. 3).

leave him, for he will not hear' and notes that '[h]e talks at random: sure the man is mad' (V.2.106). It is an interlude that undermines their relationship from the start by establishing her as well beyond his control. Suffolk sets out to attain her, yet she remains independent.

In fact, Margaret explicitly desires independence; as she tells Suffolk, '[t]o be a queen in bondage is more vile | Than is a slave in base servility' (V.2.133-5). Her comment, 'I am unworthy to be Henry's wife', is hardly the Margaret that we expect from chronicle sources. Margaret's assertion of independence sets her up as impenetrable and immune to Suffolk's persuasions although Reignier, her father, is not immune to the idea of his daughter as queen of England, and so she is handed over. Suffolk responds to Reignier directly, telling him 'I give thee kingly thanks | Because this is in *traffic* of a king' (my italics, V.2.185). Margaret is chattel here, a commodity to be traded between men, yet we know that her lack of real economic influence will prove calamitous in terms of both political authority and also, importantly, popular acceptance.

Margaret and Suffolk's interlacing words connect them both visually and philosophically; she and her courtier are bound by their love of the king, in whose interests they supposedly act. I have discussed in chapter 1 how contemporary historiography situates Margaret (and other medieval queens) at the nexus of a public and a private political arena and, crucially, as *the* primary link between the two. As in earlier historiographical and romance forms, the position of women in power is highly charged for Shakespeare. Margaret wields significant power over men, power which can be misappropriated; that power itself can weaken and emasculate them. Although Margaret is in the first instance a link between Henry and Suffolk; she will later represent a threat to their unity, a fact which is hinted at in the misapprehensions of their first meeting.

As the scene progresses, it becomes clearer how Suffolk violates his courtier role. His courtly verse conceals a pragmatic Machiavellianism: 'Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king: | But I will rule both her, the King and realm' (V.4.107-8). Assuming, again, we accept the current consensus about order of composition – *1 Henry VI* was first performed *after* *2* and *3 Henry VI* – then



the audience of *1 Henry VI* will already know that this assumption about Margaret is laughably off the mark.<sup>68</sup> The scene highlights Suffolk's rather comic misapprehension that he has authority over her (romance tradition warns us time and again that beautiful women are as capable of great evil as great goodness). In its pastiche of courtship we also see similarities with Richard of Gloucester's words on his victorious wooing of Anne Neville in *Richard III*, asking 'was ever woman in this humour woo'd | Was ever women in this humour won?'.<sup>69</sup> Suffolk (falsely) assumes that he is the aggressor and that the target is in his trap. In his opinion, 'she is a woman, therefore to be won'; he falls back on those same outmoded tropes of chivalric conquest that we saw breaking down in the earlier collision of Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne.

Suffolk thinks of Margaret as a weapon whereby he can control his king; in that function not only is she obviously miscast, but his delusion is ridiculous. In *2 Henry VI*, Margaret will send Suffolk away in an attempt to protect him and save his life, telling him, 'get thee gone so that I may know my grief; | 'Tis but surmised whiles though art standing by' (III.2.346-47). Her words are a curious reminder of Guenevere's plea for Lancelot to leave her in *Morte Darthur*; where she tells him, 'I wolde that they wolde take me and sle me and suffir you to ascape' (8.677). Yet Suffolk, unlike Lancelot, is no chivalric hero. His is no warrior-like death like Talbot's; instead he is hacked to death by common seamen as he flees England aboard ship. Suffolk suffers an ignominious end, comic even, his detached head is our last view of him as it rests on Margaret's breast as she asks: 'Here may his head lie on my throbbing breast; | But where's the body that I should embrace?' (IV.4.5-6). This passage is not only blackly comic, however; it also offers an interesting counterpart to a passage in the *Morte*. In the latter text, the sorceress Hallowes intends to capture Lancelot, kill him and embalm his body in order to have sexual relations with him after his death. In the passage below, she describes her physical desire for his dead body:

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<sup>68</sup> For a discussion on dating of *1 Henry VI*, see note 22, pages 91-92.

<sup>69</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. by James R. Siemon, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (Boston, MA: Routledge, 2009), I.2.230-31.

sytthen I myght nat rejoyse the nother thy body on lyve, I had kepte no more joy in this worlde but to have thy body dede. Than wolde I have bawmed hit and seled hit, and so to have kepte hit my lyve days; and dayly I sholde have clypped the and kissed the. (3.168)

Both passages are designed to highlight the sinister, perverted nature of the lustful woman as well as the nightmarish consequences of female objectification of the male body.

An episode in *2 Henry VI* describing the fall of the Duchess of Gloucester offers another moment when the world of medieval romance intrudes upon a masculinist historical, chronicle-based vision. Joan, at least, was motivated by national pride; Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester is motivated purely by self-interest. Yet Eleanor's ambition mirrors Joan's; they are both overreachers. Eleanor aspires to a crown she has no right to (in this she is also an early precursor of Lady Macbeth). *Hall's Chronicle* describes Eleanor's involvement in a direct threat to the king's life (under Eleanor's command, a witch called Margery Jordan makes and destroys a wax image that is a symbol of the king's body). However, Shakespeare removes from his play any real sense that the king's life is in danger: Eleanor is never truly evil, just blinded by vanity. Shakespeare's changes from Hall ensure that she is ridiculous, not sinister, in her threat to the king. And yet she becomes tragic in her demise. Eleanor accepts her punishment and her shame as she is led away to imprisonment. Her state has fallen from the 'richest robes' to 'barefoot' in a 'white sheet'. From the second woman in the land who dresses to rival the queen, she is now a barefoot woman carrying her own candle, and accompanied by her gaoler. Her punishment is highly theatrical; she is paraded through the streets of London dressed in white, '[t]he abject people gazing' and 'laughing' at her shame. This is a public punishment commonly given to prostitutes:

*Enter Eleanor [barefoot, and] a white sheet [about her, with a wax candle] in her hand, [and verses written on her back and pinned on, and accompanied with] the Sheriff [of London, and Sir John Stanley and officers with bills and halberds and commoners] (II.4)*

Like Eleanor, Guenevere is tried and publicly shamed and almost executed (three times in fact) during the course of *Morte Darthur*. Unlike Guenevere, though, Eleanor *is* guilty of the political manoeuvring which is attributed to her. Yet we must also remember that she has been manipulated by Suffolk; like the king himself, whom she had conspired to overthrow, she is not in control of her own fate.

Guenevere had been led away in ritualised preparation for death, the 'gostely fadir was brought to her to be shriven of her myssededis' and 'then she is 'dispoyled into her smoke' (8.682). The similarity between these punishments is interesting; Eleanor is also shorn of the trappings of her wealth and power and the ritual of her punishment is also focused on public humiliation. Unlike her husband whose punishment is private (a loss of political influence), Eleanor is forced to endure her punishment in full public gaze and the physical degradation emphasises the extent of her fall. She has returned to the status of commoner, as she says:

My shame will not be shifted with my sheet:

No, it will hang upon my richest robes

And show itself, attire me how I can.

Go, lead the way, I long to see my prison. (2*HVI*, II.4.107-10)

As Eleanor refers here to her 'shame', we can see that she has internalised her disgrace. Again we might compare this with the final vision of Guenevere, who 'stale away with five ladyes with her, and so she wente to Amysbury ... grete penaunce she toke upon her, as even ded synfull woman in thys londe. And never creature coude make her myry, but ever she lyved in fastynge, prayers, and almesdedis that all maner of people mervayled how virtuously she was changed' (8.717-20). Ultimately, Eleanor and Guenevere's retreats offer similar visions of feminine punishment but also redemption. Their formal withdrawal from the world of men enables their individual salvation. The Catholic imagery that describes Eleanor in this part of 2 *Henry VI* is no accident; it enables a nostalgic version of female submission, of female militancy contained, a Guenevere-like retreat to the private female

space of the nunnery in which she can strive for forgiveness and a virtue that had been corrupted by her public political role. The final view of Margaret in *3 Henry VI* fulfils a similar function; bent over the dead body of her son at the end her body becomes a figurative statement of humiliation and submission.

In this section, we have seen how female power is often used to highlight an absence of male authority in the *Henry VI* plays: Henry's gender trouble manifests itself in Margaret, the Duke of Gloucester is brought low by means of his wife's disgrace, Talbot's abandonment by his allies in war is signposted in his extraordinary meeting with the Countess. But female power highlights too the failure of a chivalric model to secure stability and patriarchal order. Shakespeare uses medieval romance here to dramatise a concern about the unreliability of history; Gloucester warns Henry that the King's marriage to Margaret will be responsible for 'Blotting your names from books of memory, | Razing the characters of your renown, | Defacing monuments of conquer'd France, | Undoing all, as all had never been!' (*2HVI*, I.1.97-100). Henry and Margaret's reputations are destroyed by the shifting perspective of history just as the Countess scene causes us to re-assess Talbot's glamorous chivalry. The plays' emphatic medievalism highlights a lost heroic past and an emergent individualism which fractures the bonds between men and opens the door to Margaret's newly troubling political autonomy.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we have seen in section II that the nexus of romance and history enables a portrait of idealised national history even whilst it also portrays the disintegration of those ideals. In *Piers Penniless* written in 1592, Thomas Nashe famously discussed the potential for theatrical performance to resurrect activity that has been muted by history; asserting that it is only through

the process of staging Shakespeare's play, in its every performance, that Talbot might live again. He exclaims:

how would it have joied brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had  
lyne two hundred years in this tome hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his  
bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least who, in the  
Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.<sup>70</sup>

Nashe refers to 'these degenerate, effeminate days of ours'; he sees the past, by contrast, as masculine and heroic.<sup>71</sup> For Nashe, the purpose of history, then, is to excavate a nobler past; history creates heroes as well as destroying them.

*1 Henry VI* reflects a clear vision of a decaying present versus an idealised past in its elegiac opening, its lament for the lost glories of Henry V and Talbot. Shakespeare establishes a temporal distance between the world of these plays and the world of its audience by showing a modern politics and historical awareness intruding upon an ancient and timeless chivalric social order; their romance episodes and archaism force a distinction between the present time of the plays' performance and the historical moment in which they are situated. Given the multiplicity of generic influences and the fact that Shakespeare uses newly-created romance interludes to call into question what we understand as 'history', it is perhaps surprising that Tillyard's vision of the plays as an origin myth for the Tudor dynasty has been so resilient. Furthermore, there is no contemporary evidence that Margaret's presentation as a warrior queen was in any way controversial given there was a regnant queen in the years surrounding the plays' composition and performance, which leads me to conclude that their medievalism effectively distances events on stage from the immediate Elizabethan context of their earliest audiences.

In section I we saw that Margaret is the personification of militaristic female rule for Shakespeare. Unexpectedly, though, there are times when her autonomous performance of

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<sup>70</sup> *Piers Penniless*, p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> *Piers Penniless*, p. 60.

sovereignty is seen in positive terms. I have shown here that women don't just thwart men's plots, as critical consensus suggests; they also generate significant activity. The portrayal of active queenship here tells us, too, about the successful performance of kingship; it is very clear from the portrayal of Margaret that the degree of autonomy of a queen is negatively correlated with the success of her husband. Since the state of queenship is also often used to signify the health of a nation and the success (or failure) of male sovereignty, it's not a coincidence that these are Shakespeare's only histories with a dominant female voice.

We have seen in this chapter the impact of performance and of textual complexities on the portrayal of Margaret, but instabilities in the deployment of its medieval sources also enable unparalleled understanding of the roles of women in these plays. McNeal argues with respect to Shakespeare's first tetralogy that the 'strange blending of real and romantic was an unavoidable rather than a planned invention', that it was an accidental outcome of the shapeless mess of chronicles that Shakespeare inherited, chronicles which also blended together heroic and romance visions with chronicle history.<sup>72</sup> But the fact is that those scenes that are mostly indebted to romance are precisely those scenes that do *not* appear amongst Shakespeare's sources, which implies that these romance interludes are far from accidental. In section II I argued that medieval ideals of virtue in battle as well as courtly love and chivalric purpose are all subverted in these plays. The concern over an idealised heroic past unable to compete with the political machinations of the present is a theme that Shakespeare will revisit in his later romances and also in *Henry VIII*, as I shall now go on to discuss in chapter 3.

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<sup>72</sup> McNeal, 'Romantic Princess and Troubled Queen', p. 4.

### Chapter 3

#### Katherine *versus* Anne in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* and its sources

We saw in chapter 1 that Christine de Pizan's *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* places especial emphasis on the queen's intimacy with the king and, more specifically, her private influence over him; it lists peaceful mediation, intercession and advocacy as essential attributes of successful queenship. Christine describes men as 'by nature more courageous and more hot-headed and women are by nature more timid and of sweeter disposition'; she goes on, 'for this reason ... they can be the best means of pacifying men'.<sup>1</sup> Mediation or intercession is usually portrayed as a specifically female power based on vulnerability and has been extensively discussed in critical treatments of queenship in the late medieval and early modern periods. I have shown in an earlier chapter how portrayals of medieval queens reflect an ongoing debate about women's capacity to influence their husbands; queens' specifically *feminine* virtues – mercy, love, chastity – are often seen as fundamental to securing both private and public harmony, even though the public sphere of queenship remains especially problematic. I will now shift my attention to Jacobean representations of medieval queenship as I seek to show that the cultural concern about explicit female power is a permanent one, unaffected by the inauguration of regnant queenship.

There is a clear gap here between chapters 2 and 3; I am ignoring the main period of Shakespeare's creativity, it seems. I have not discussed Cleopatra, Goneril, Lady Macbeth, Volumnia, or many other of his powerful women. This is not a thesis about Shakespeare's women, though. My concern here, instead, is to show that Shakespeare's revival of interest in writing history after a long gap causes him to re-frame pre-existing controversies about queenship in new ways. I seek to look at *changes* in the treatment of powerful women in the period before, during, and after, the main

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<sup>1</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, p. 24.

period of Shakespeare's dominance to identify the permanent impact of the inauguration of regnant queenship on the presentation of queenship.

My thesis is really about the extent to which regnant queenship changes – or fails to change – the portrayal of powerful women and considering Shakespeare's earliest plays in contrast to his last plays helps me to do that without necessitating a formal canonical discussion. In fact, I seek to demonstrate that tropes of queenship do not develop in a strictly linear way. A narrative arc stretching from Malory in the late fifteenth century through to Jonson's masques of the early seventeenth century, serves to show how representations of queens work to re-frame and re-cast medieval tropes of intercession *over time* despite large temporal gaps. It enables me to show, too, that regnant queenship does not actually have the impact of valorising active queenship – on the contrary, it causes a reversion in the Jacobean period to an older, medieval form of female influence.

In his influential work *Medieval Queenship*, John C. Parsons suggests that a queen's public political influence is based on her personal relationship with the king.<sup>2</sup> I have shown how the most controversial English queen, Margaret of Anjou, is explicitly and repeatedly condemned for violating this liminal role but also that there are ways to defend her activity. Here in chapter 3, I will identify a similar concern at work in depictions of *both* Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. I will examine how the tropes of intercession play out with respect to these two women, and I will ask to what extent their textual manifestations conform to or challenge the concept of queenship we saw in earlier chapters. I shall argue again that the discourse proves that intercessory power is not the only conventional queenly virtue. Texts as varied as Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* and Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* offer evidence that wisdom and counsel are also valid and complementary forms of queenship.

I will begin by examining the oppositional pattern that dominates textual depictions of Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Even modern historiography cannot resist the tendency to

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<sup>2</sup> John C. Parsons, 'Family, Sex and Power: The Rhythms of Medieval Queenship', in *Medieval Queenship*, pp. 1-13.



think of one woman *versus* the other, of usurped queenly prerogative that pits the new *against* the old. Even before the actual moment of her coronation, Anne was set up in contrast to her predecessor; Henry VIII himself set up this oppositional structure when he raised Anne to queen and ‘demoted’ Katherine to widow. In section I, I will explore the ways in which contemporaneous historiography and even contemporary analysis sees the world in light of these oppositions. An awareness of the sectarianism of contemporaneous sources necessarily forms an important part of any analysis of the ways in which the characters of these queens are portrayed. I will show how the partisan nature of the sources ensures that Katherine and Anne are seen as having opposing natures; they are not simply competitors but opposites. My study of several of these sources will expose a series of dialectical characteristics: sexual desire *versus* chastity, beauty *versus* plainness, liveliness *versus* shyness, pride *versus* humility. Sources which focus on Anne’s supposed sexual deviancy, her sexual desire and experience, often do so as a way of drawing attention to Katherine’s humility and her chastity.

The accuracy of allegation or defence is not the real point here; the usual question about Anne – whether she was or was not guilty of adultery – is not my focus any more than it was when I looked at allegations about Margaret in chapter 1. In this thesis, the innocence or guilt of vilified queens is less relevant to my discussion than the *form* of the allegations against, or defences of, the accused women. I seek to ask how these allegations are framed and how they vary over time. In my earlier chapters on Margaret of Anjou I examined how defences of women use ritualised depictions of queens to assert their moral value. In section I, I will show how recurring tropes of condemnation apply to Henry VIII’s first queens; I will ask what is the *textual* process by which these women are condemned and what similarities and distinctions might be traced in the language of opposition or transgression?

In section II, I will ask how defences of queens work *as texts* to secure their public authority, and I will show how the generic nature of those defences creates echoes between women – women who are apparently opposed – that have not been fully recognised. I will draw attention to textual

patterns which in fact appear to imply a degree of *alignment* between Katherine and Anne, rather than the more usual opposition. Defences of women and attacks against them fall into well established and ritualised forms because queenly ideals demand these qualities. We shall see, for example, that both Katherine of Aragon *and* Anne Boleyn are described as chaste, wise, virtuous and humble. Here, I will examine how various defences force generic expectations on each of these women and then judge them according to their ability to conform to those standardised roles. Expectations for queenship are used to defend, support and confirm legitimacy and this process establishes unexpected similarities between the two queens. In the final section of this chapter, I will consider Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* with its suggestion – one that bears similarities to the arguments of Christine de Pizan – that successful queenship lies in a hierarchy of chastity, wisdom and humility.<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare and Fletcher do not simply balance an idealised queen against a malignant 'other' as is so common in other sources, a virtuous queen against a subversive. On the contrary, I will argue, they subvert their sources so as to *conflate* these two women.

*Henry VIII* represents an effort to excavate a near past which was still controversial and ambiguous, and at the same time it uses a deliberate medievalism, a nostalgic sense of a familiar past, to distinguish past from present, distancing its authors from a potentially incendiary or subversive discussion about active queenship. We saw a similar effect in Shakespeare's portrayal of Margaret of Anjou in chapter 2; in this respect, *Henry VIII* is an interesting companion piece to his earlier history plays, which is why I have chosen to juxtapose them in this thesis, deliberately jumping forward to the last year or two of Shakespeare's writing life. Although some nineteenth-century critics thought *Henry VIII* must have been written under Elizabeth, not James, its explicit sympathy for Katherine of Aragon tells us that *Henry VIII* could only have been written after

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis I have accepted recent critical consensus that *Henry VIII* was composed by a combination of William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. For detailed attributional analysis and a history of the authorship debate see *Henry VIII*, ed. by Gordon McMullan, published by Arden in 2001.

Elizabeth's death.<sup>4</sup> In its famous scene containing the vision of Katherine of Aragon (Act IV, Scene 2), *Henry VIII* exposes a new supernatural and premonitory consciousness, one interested not only in national politics but also in the spiritual and psychological fracture that mirrors national political shifts. Unusually, it uses sympathy for Katherine to 'resurrect' by association the reputation of Elizabeth's mother, Anne.

*Henry VIII* portrays a weak and tired king, a king who is troubled by his 'conscience' (the word is oft-repeated throughout the play) but who is passive, guided by Wolsey, at least for the first part of the play. It manifests a newly ambiguous portrayal of morality and political power because it represents an effort to inscribe the past with a set of new meanings – not to articulate historical fact but to suggest a different version of what might have been. There is, in the early scenes at least, a political vacuum at the heart of government; political assertiveness comes from Katherine of Aragon, not from the king himself. Even so, it is clear from the start that intercession is an important principle by which queenship is judged. The political authority of the king and his popularity are bolstered by Katherine: she moderates Henry's weak political decisions; she represents the voice of the people, she re-connects him to popular opinion. A weaker king requires a more active queen; even though Katherine does fall from power, she is never subjected to the same criticism or condemnation as Margaret of Anjou.

Shakespeare's previous history play, *Henry V*, had been performed as far back as 1599, and by the time he came to write *Henry VIII* his interest in the role and importance of history seems to have changed materially.<sup>5</sup> Phyllis Rackin has suggested that *Henry V*'s use of the Chorus to narrate action sequences serves to highlight the 'impossibility of ever discovering the full truth about the past'. In *Henry VIII* too we see a variety of perspectives which become increasingly self-reflexive or

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<sup>4</sup> For evidence of the argument in favour of *Henry VIII* as an Elizabethan text, see Thomas Campbell, *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare, with Remarks on His Life and Writings*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1838), 1.iii.

<sup>5</sup> T. W. Craik argues that allusions to Essex's campaign 'imply that Henry V was acted between March 1599 and September of that year' (when Essex returned to court out of favour) in his introduction to *Henry V*, p. 3.

unreliable.<sup>6</sup> Its authors are not aspiring to historical accuracy; indeed there are several incidences in the play of wilful anachronism – but, as I have noted, accuracy is not the point here. Despite drawing heavily on Holinshed and Hall, the play is not merely a transliteration of historiographical sources, the ‘worme-eaten bookes’ which Thomas Nashe famously warns against in *Piers Penniless*, nor are they even limited by a strict historical chronology.<sup>7</sup> *Henry VIII* is a deliberately nostalgic play which portrays both an idealised past and a confused present, blurring the distinctions between historical and literary truth – another respect in which the play is closely related to the *Henry VI* plays. *Henry VIII* is often described as closer to romance than history (see Phyllis Rackin’s *Stages of History*, for example), and in its treatment of a benevolent providence – most overtly crystallised in Cranmer’s glorious, if optimistic prophecy – it also clearly resembles elements of Shakespeare’s later romances, as I shall show.<sup>8</sup>

Like the latter books of *Morte Darthur*, this play shows a kingdom which is past its glory, disintegrating through discord and dissent. As with the mythical Arthur, Henry VIII’s leadership is tarnished by the failure of succession which so obsessed him. Henry owed to a different Arthur, his brother, his entire kingdom, but Arthur’s death also cleared the way for Henry’s propagandist creation: a mythic king who brings a sense of nationhood and independence to a conflicted country. Daniel Keegan describes the portrayal of Henry in this play as a process of performance; creating the king of legend.<sup>9</sup> Paul Bertram agrees, arguing that the play offers a portrait of ‘a king who reigns becoming a king who rules’.<sup>10</sup> As in *Henry VI*, this process of performance, of political drama and self-presentation, is critical. We shall see in section III the political ambiguities and complexities of *Henry VIII*: the king grows in stature throughout the course of the play, whilst successive cycles of changing fortunes (the fall of Buckingham, Wolsey, Katherine, the rise of Anne, near-fall of Cranmer and so

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<sup>6</sup> Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Nashe, *Piers Penniless*, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Keegan, ‘Performing Prophecy: More Life on the Shakespearean Stage’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 62.3 (Fall, 2011), 420–43 (p. 434).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Bertram, *Shakespeare and The Two Noble Kinsmen* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 163.

on) conclude in Cranmer's final prophetic dream and the final redemption of Henry and the Tudor dynasty. I also intend to show here how ambivalent is this vision of mythic glory; how transient Henry's victory. Elizabeth cannot, in actuality, reproduce herself like the phoenix, and even legitimate heirs can die; the play's earliest audiences must have recalled vividly the death of prince Henry only months earlier.

I argued in chapter 1 that the romance form can expose contemporary expectations for society, for women, for leadership, and might be used carefully to address holes in historiographical material. I will show in this chapter how *Henry VIII* restores some of the marginalised and controversial female voices of Tudor historiographic tradition. Phyllis Rackin argues that there is no representation anywhere in Shakespeare of female authority, pointing out that only the subversive Margaret has a major role on stage in the *Henry VI* tetralogy.<sup>11</sup> Yet I will argue here that the complex queenship of *Henry VIII* disproves this theory; Katherine fulfils more than an intermediary function, and she does so successfully. I seek to prove that by deliberately blurring the distinctions between Katherine and Anne in *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare and Fletcher maximise the positive impact of queenship, emphasising unity rather than dissent, mediation rather than opposition.

## I Katherine and Anne opposed

Throughout nearly five hundred years of history these two queens have been directly opposed; they were set against each other from the start by Henry himself. In April 1533, Carlo Capello, a member of the Venetian Embassy to England, reported Henry's new proclamation warning the people not to speak 'otherwise than well of his new marriage and queen Anne', and to prepare the entertainments and expenditures usually made for the queen's coronation.<sup>12</sup> According to Capello, Henry also prohibited any mention of 'Queen Katherine'. Despite Henry's efforts, there is evidence of

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<sup>11</sup> Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice*, Vol 4, Letter 878, p. 398.

considerable popular support for Katherine. Modern historians continue to argue about the extent to which his second marriage is a direct result of the failure of the first; did the desire to secure Anne lead to his casting off of Katherine? The question is important because it determines the extent to which these two queens *were* actually direct opponents – one rises as the other falls – or whether depictions of them should be read instead as symbols of wider political and religious schism and political dissent. In other words, we might usefully ask whether they are seen in the sources as political symbols or as individualised women, and how might we distinguish between the two?

In general, contemporaneous sources suggest that Henry's first two marriages were not simply about replacing one woman with another. Whilst marriage to Anne was fairly obviously part of the appeal of getting rid of Katherine, we should not underestimate Henry's concern over the succession, nor the ideological conflict which continued to dominate his actions for the latter part of his reign. Henry desired an heir, an heir which Katherine could not provide, and divorce and marriage to Anne Boleyn became reasonable solutions to both problems. But whilst the fates of these two women *were* intertwined, it was not necessarily the causal relationship that it is often taken to be. I will show later that Shakespeare and Fletcher emphasise the issue of Henry's 'conscience', as opposed to his lust for Anne; although his lust and his conscience coincide, this shouldn't rule out a serious ideological concern on Henry's part.

Discussions of the coronation rituals for queens, such as Parsons' 'Family, Sex and Power: The Rhythms of Medieval Queenship' and Joanna Laynesmith in her monograph *The Last Medieval Queens*, have established that a queen performs a vital validating function as part of the king's public body.<sup>13</sup> In our case, of course, that function is problematised because Katherine was still considered queen even after Anne's coronation. So the two queens were necessarily oppositional at that point. If the queen's public function is a reflection of the glory of the king, then the true queen had to have all the righteousness, the other only a shadow of it. In this section I will consider the

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<sup>13</sup> John C. Parsons, 'Family, Sex and Power' in *Medieval Queenship*, pp. 1-13; Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 73.

sectarianism of the sources to ask in what way are these queens opposed deliberately and how do these sources work as texts to balance Katherine and Anne against each other? This will enable me to consider later how, and more importantly why, the division between these women is completely re-worked in *Henry VIII*.

Even modern historians conform to a long tradition of bias or allegiance when it comes to Anne and Katherine; the fall of Anne only three months after the death of Katherine has led to a kind of subconscious moralising in both modern and contemporaneous historiography whereby the fall of one is taken as punishment for the death of the other. G. W. Bernard dismisses the traditional view of Anne as the 'inspiration for break with Rome and royal supremacy, the patroness of Protestant reformers and the woman who refused to sleep with Henry for 10 years', whilst Eric Ives maintains on the contrary that Anne Boleyn did play a major role in pushing Henry toward religious reform.<sup>14</sup> Ives goes on to argue that 'Catholic hatred of Anne Boleyn damned her for the break with Rome and for the entrance of heresy into England. It was right on both counts'.<sup>15</sup> Amongst historians of the past century, the most pervasive explanation of Anne's fall is that she was the victim of a powerful factional conspiracy. In 'The Fall of Anne Boleyn', Bernard examines this argument and finds it unconvincing. Bernard suggests there was no conspiracy, instead Henry was himself the driver of Reformation ideals, the divorce, the break with Rome, and that he, not his advisers, was the driving political force in England at this time. Bernard resurrects the historically unfashionable view of Henry as a strong and efficient king but by building up the strength and charisma of the king, Bernard diminishes the political role of Anne and makes it incidental.<sup>16</sup>

Bernard's argument leads straight back to the binary view of king *versus* queen and queen *versus* queen, which unfortunately is precisely what he is in theory trying to get away from. He also reprimands his fellow historians for their presumption of Anne's innocence and, in so doing, resurrects the traditional portrait of Katherine as victim of Anne's manoeuvrings. Most

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<sup>14</sup> Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), Chapter 3, pp. 277-87.

<sup>15</sup> Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, p. 261.

<sup>16</sup> G. W. Bernard, 'The Fall of Anne Boleyn', *EHR*, 106 (1991), 584-610.

contemporary historians are guilty of this in some respect: they come down on one side or another – Anne as agent of her own fate, a whore/traitor/reforming radical – or Anne as the hapless victim of a factional conspiracy of Aragonese defenders of the faith who opposed the divorce and break with Rome. In his essay ‘Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn’, Greg Walker notes that ‘alternative theories are always assumed to be clear cut and mutually exclusive: she was either guilty or else the victim of a factional conspiracy’.<sup>17</sup> Walker traces the known timeline – specifically the speed of Anne’s fall – and he concludes that the truth lies somewhere between the two: she was neither guilty of the acts which she was accused of, nor was she entirely innocent. In other words, he argues that she was convicted not of what she did, but what she said; unguarded, flirtatious comments to her admirers. What I’ve briefly highlighted here is the extent to which even modern historians fall, albeit unwittingly, into an oppositional structure that places an innocent (*either Katherine or Anne*) against a hostile or corrupt political infrastructure.

What matters is not so much the actual history of events but the question of *how* that history is transmitted or mediated; all historiography contains ambiguity and dissent and it often seeks to apply retrospective logic or linearity. Retha M. Warnicke suggests that we need to recognise partisanship as a particular problem in the portrayal of women; she refers to ‘histories that treat men as three-dimensional and complex personalities [in which] the women shine forth in universal stereotypes: the shrew, the whore, the tease, the shy virgin, or the blessed mother’.<sup>18</sup> She sees the oppositional history of Anne and Katherine as derived from the limited terms of reference that exist to describe the roles and temperaments of women. But later Warnicke confirms the same oppositional theme by speculating that a miscarriage in early 1536, reported only in Nicolas Sander’s *De Origine ac Progressu Schismaticis Anglicani Liber* or *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism* published in Latin in 1585, led to Anne’s fall, rather than any grander political or ideological

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<sup>17</sup> Greg Walker, ‘Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn’, *The Historical Journal*, 45.1 (Mar, 2002), 1-29 (p. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 57.



narrative. Warnicke argues that the deformed foetus would have been taken by Henry as proving some of the baser allegations of Anne's detractors and that he would have been suspicious about the parentage of such a baby.<sup>19</sup> It seems unlikely that a foetus of three months could be seen to be deformed, or indeed that Henry would have seen it as a manifestation of witchcraft or adultery. The slight evidence Warnicke cites relies on an assumption that Henry was more manipulated than scheming or powerful.

This vision of Henry as misguided and manipulated is another important part of the literary development of the story of the fall of Anne, I will show in section III that it becomes an important feature of *Henry VIII*, too. From the first evidence of trouble to her execution, Anne's fall took just three weeks. All these modern treatments of Tudor history are concerned with finding a rational explanation for the speed and depth of Anne's fall from grace. In doing so, they tend to create a binary outlook that posits Anne as either a powerful threat or a powerless victim. And if Anne is bad, the argument generally concludes, then that means Katherine was good; a blameless victim of Anne's political will and sexual desire.

We have seen above the extent to which even modern historians confirm the portraits of these queens as oppositional. If we examine the sectarianism of contemporaneous sources, we will see that treatments of Katherine and Anne reflect similar fragmentation and factionalism (in so doing, we should remember that defences of Anne necessarily imply criticism of the king, therefore they became more commonplace after Henry's death). Starting with the broadly pro-Katherine texts, supporters usually emphasise her learning as distinguishing her from other women. William Forrest's verse history *The History of Grisild the Second* is very sympathetic to Katherine – unsurprisingly, given that Forrest was chaplain to her daughter Mary Tudor.<sup>20</sup> Forrest attributes Wolsey's fall to Anne's vengeance, claiming that Wolsey prevented Anne's intended early marriage to the heir of the powerful duchy of Northumberland, Henry Percy (there is little actual evidence of this putative

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<sup>19</sup> Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, pp. 203-04.

<sup>20</sup> His verse was drafted in manuscript in 1558 for Mary Tudor, but it was not printed until 1875 so obviously it was not widely known.

marriage). Forrest establishes the tradition of Katherine as an exemplar of noble queenship and suffering, and he initiates a recurring comparison of her with Griselda which I shall revisit in section II. In his verse there is an obvious tension between the sympathetic portrayal of Katherine and the portrayal of Henry VIII as a villainous king or tyrannical husband. Although Forrest describes the two queens as directly opposed in some places, in others they are both seen as victims of the king's wilful blindness. In the following passage, Forrest shows visually the political superiority of one over the other. *History of Grisild* describes:

From thense wheare hee [i.e. King Henry] came, faste iumpe by his syde,  
 Accompayned hym the ladye Anne Bullayne,  
 All pleasaunte, fresche and gallaunt that tyde,  
 Goode Grysilde following, as one of hyer trayne,  
 At whiche manye (that wife weare) did disdayne  
 So noble a woman to bee forsake,  
 And in her steade so meane a thinge to take.<sup>21</sup>

Here Anne Boleyn rides side-by-side with the king whilst Katherine is forced to follow as one of her ladies-in-waiting (the position which Anne had only recently vacated) to the general condemnation of onlookers.

Other contemporary references to Katherine do not show similar subservience, however, and there is evidence of her military and political influence from early in the sixteenth century, well before Anne appeared on the scene. An anonymous Venetian diplomat wrote in 1512 that 'the king will prepare a fleet and attack France in the Spring'. He commented that 'the queen [is] very warm about this and would like to get four great galleasses and two bastards from the Signory, asking the cost and saying that France was building two bastard galleasses. [...] The king is for war, the Council

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<sup>21</sup> Forrest, *The History of Grisild*, p. 69.

against and the queen for it'.<sup>22</sup> In this source, Katherine is an advisor to the king equal in influence to his Council and also she is an effective military strategist; she seeks to decide upon the provision of military equipment in the war to come. In June of 1513 a rumour spread that Katherine would accompany Henry to the battlefield of France, followed by an announcement that she would remain in England as regent. Judith Richards also tells us that Katherine was actively involved in military preparations to defend against an attack across the border by the Scots, and she traces various rumours that she would personally lead the troops to battle.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Peter Martyr wrote to Erasmus in the early sixteenth century that 'Queen Katherine, in imitation of her mother Isabelle ... made splendid oration to the English captains', and notes that Katherine 'told them to be ready to defend their territory ... and that they should remember that English courage excelled that of all other nations'. 'Fired by these words', Martyr concludes, 'the nobles marched against the Scots ... and defeated them'.<sup>24</sup> These depictions of Katherine's military engagement fly in the face of popular discourse based on those defences which stress her piety, her vulnerability and her peacefulness.

Henry, too, refers to Katherine in explicitly military terms; his letters refer to her as 'so haughty in spirit, she might, by favour of the princess raise a number of men, and make war (as boldly as did the queen ... her mother)'.<sup>25</sup> Carole Levin has even argued that it was Katherine's military experience that led Henry to discard her so publicly; she suggests in *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England* that Henry may have had fears that Katherine might, like her mother, lead a revolt against the English crown and lead troops into battle.<sup>26</sup> According to Eustace Chapuys, too, Imperial Ambassador to Henry's court, the king feared that the queen would raise her

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<sup>22</sup> *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R. H. Brodie (1862-1932), Vol I, i, p. 1475. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>23</sup> Judith Richards, 'Mary Tudor: Renaissance Queen of England', in *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations*, ed. by Carole Levin, J.E. Carney and D. Barrett-Graves (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 27-45 (p. 30).

<sup>24</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Vol. I, ii, p. 2268.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters and Papers*, Vol. V, viii, p. 429.

<sup>26</sup> Carole Levin, J. E. Carney and D. Barrett-Graves, 'Introduction', in *High and Mighty Queens*, pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

standard in defence of herself and her daughter.<sup>27</sup> So, despite the common depiction of her as an unfortunate victim of Henry's quest for an heir and the related schism from Rome, there is plenty of evidence that Katherine was an active political player, and a queen who was closely involved in the military issues of her day.

I have shown that when Margaret of Anjou took control from her incapable husband, she was vilified in particular for a breach of the normal and proper behaviour of a queen. Yet there is no evidence that Katherine's involvement in military and political activity is ever described as an usurpation of the king's prerogative. Katherine was, like Margaret, a foreigner, and like Margaret she was linked by blood to her husband's greatest political rivals (daughter of Philip and Isabella of Spain, and aunt to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor from 1519). Yet she enjoyed a popularity far in excess of Margaret mainly because, unlike Margaret, Katherine was the wife of an able king, which meant that she could be seen as incrementally powerful without acquiring a subversive power in her own right. Unlike Margaret too, portraits of Katherine as 'haughty' and military, making 'splendid orations' to fire up her troops, have tended to be forgotten over time amidst a more enduring dialectic that has defined her more simply as a victim of Anne's aggression and manipulation.

There is evidence that Katherine continued to be an active queen; even after her fall from power, she deliberately and actively kept her name in the public eye with her charitable and religious activities, circumventing Henry's wishes. Timothy G. Elston has traced the process whereby she deliberately maintained a pious and humble public image in 'Widowed Princess or Neglected Queen?'.<sup>28</sup> He points out, for example, that in 1535 she asked if the king might allow her to perform Maundy service, which Elston takes as proof that she wanted to demonstrate her piety – although he points out that the service was never actually performed. Martin Giustinian, the Venetian

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<sup>27</sup> *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain, Preserved in the Archives at Venice, Simancas, Besonco and Bruxelles*, ed. by G. A. Bergenroth and others, Vol. 5, 1.142 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1862-1954), p. 430.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy G. Elston, 'Widowed Princess or Neglected Queen: Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII, and English Public Opinion, 1533-1536', in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, pp. 16-30 (p. 23).

ambassador to France, describes a queen as ‘beloved as if she had been of the royal blood of England’.<sup>29</sup> And anecdotal evidence of her influence on lace-making industries in Bedfordshire and Gloucestershire also might be taken as proof of her effort to connect with working classes, especially women.<sup>30</sup> It seems Katherine was pretty successful in her efforts to keep herself in the public consciousness; various contemporary sources reveal popular disapproval of the divorce across the social spectrum. It proved hard for Henry to sell the idea of Katherine as widow not wife, in part because of her active efforts to maintain her own public image as queen.

We saw above how even contemporary perceptions about Katherine and Anne alike have been affected by the binary nature of the source material. In the case of Anne, repeating allegations about sexual misbehaviour stand in deliberate contrast with the image of piety and moderation which Katherine cultivated. In a poem written in French in 1536, the diplomat and scholar Lancelot de Carlos admits that he is versifying rumours about her when he asserts Anne’s guilt and her attraction to men, describing ‘des yeulx encor[es] plus attirante, | Lesquelz savoit bien conduyre a propos’ – eyes always most attractive which she knew well how to use with effect.<sup>31</sup> The terms of reference of his poem are clear: her physical allure, her sophistication, her threatening and deliberate seductiveness as well as the suggestion that Anne Boleyn obtained the king’s hand by withholding sexual favours. Similar allegations proliferated against both Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville; Polydore Vergil had described Edward IV as ‘led by blynde affection, and not by reule of reason’.<sup>32</sup> In other words, he sees a king weakened by his physical desire for Elizabeth

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<sup>29</sup> *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice*, ed. R. Brown et al (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1864), 4: 871, April 15 1533, Martin Giustinian to the Signory.

<sup>30</sup> Elston summarises current research into this area in ‘Widowed Princess or Neglected Queen’, pages 24-5.

<sup>31</sup> Lancelot de Carlos, ‘Histoire de Anne Boleyn Jadis Royne d’Angleterre’, in G. Ascoli, *La Grande-Bretagne devant L’Opinion Francaise* (Paris: Lib. U. J. Gambler, 1927), p. 234, lines 62-63.

<sup>32</sup> *The Three Books of Polydore Vergil*, p. 117.

Woodville. The Imperial Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, uses similar terms when he describes how Anne had 'bewitched and cast a spell' over Henry.<sup>33</sup>

Although Chapuys was certainly a well-placed observer at court and a less obviously speculative source than de Carlos, Chapuys' letters are deeply biased because they are written by a man who was working for and corresponding with the Emperor of Spain, who was Katherine's nephew as well as a staunch Catholic. Throughout Chapuys' correspondence, Anne famously appears as the 'concubine' and a 'goggyll yed hoore'.<sup>34</sup> Chapuys saw Anne as dangerous and sinister, sexually seductive and sexually available, in contrast to Katherine's chastity and religiosity. Multiple other sources contend that Anne's sexual influence over the king led to grave injustice and political instability; the important point is the frequency with which allegations of seductive and predatory behaviour recur and the similarities between them. Sander's *Schismatis Anglicani* focuses on her sexual promiscuity and influence over Henry. As in de Carlos' poem, here Anne bolsters her appeal by actively withholding her sexual favours, and then offers them in return for political influence.

Sander's is a ferociously pro-Catholic source of tales about Anne's sexual promiscuity, physical deformity and incest (it also adds the new detail about her miscarriage of an aborted foetus that Warnicke takes so seriously). Its terms of reference revolve around the sexual; Anne's provocative sexuality ensnares the weak king and it secures her own destruction. Sander describes Anna as 'infaelix', 'disimillima', 'infaelicissima', repeatedly highlighting her licentiousness, and he blames her for the schism with Rome. He claims that Anne was a woman given to pride and to self-love he says, 'illa quoque se ex turba subduxit, nec hoc sine causa secisse Regem suspicata', 'this wicked living could not long be kept hid from the king'.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps in part due to its scurrilous tone, the text was widely read and permanently defined anti-Anne sentiment: it was the basis for every subsequent Catholic history of the Reformation. Sander's image of Anne as ambitious and

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<sup>33</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain*, Vol 5, ii.13, pp. 26-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Letters and Papers*, 8: 196 (Feb 11, 1535); 8: 324 Mar 3, 1535).

<sup>35</sup> Nicolai Sanderi, *De Origine ac Progressu Schismatis Anglicani* (Rome, 1598), p. 222; 200, trans. by. David Lewis (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), p. 133.

manipulative, using the promise of sexual favours to elicit the support of the king, recurs in stories of Anne right up to the present day.

In the anonymous *Spanish Chronicle*, written in around 1550 but not translated until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – a source which is notoriously inaccurate, gossipy, and full of hearsay – an old woman described as a ‘pander’ sets up an elaborate ruse to bring various men to Anne’s bed in secret. She conceals Mark Smeaton (known only as Mark as a signifier of his low social status) in an antechamber in a closet, and then when the queen calls for preserves in the night, the old woman, ‘went to the closet, and made Mark undress, and took the marmalade to the queen, leading Mark by the hand ... the old woman left Mark behind the Queen’s bed, and said out loud, ‘here is the marmalade, my lady’. The chronicler concludes ‘no man could imagine all the wickedness’.<sup>36</sup> However improbable the story; the depiction of sexual intrigue and subterfuge is clearly a powerful one and has cast a powerful shadow. I will argue in section III that this pander is a forerunner to Shakespeare and Fletcher’s Old Lady, the bawd of *Henry VIII*.

It has become clear that accusations of overtly sexualised behaviour are a recurring feature of hostile textual treatments of Anne both during and after her lifetime. Most of these sources read her fall as inevitable punishment for her behaviour, and in that respect they have an explicitly didactic purpose. Fears about sexual deviancy and Anne’s influence are often contrasted with the chastity and humility which is the usual vehicle for representations of Katherine. Attacks on Anne depend on seeing her as the anti-Katherine, the adulteress, the sexual adventurer, the famed beauty, or the radical reformer. Since they could scarcely blame the king, Henry’s guilt in the divorce is barely mentioned in sources, which sustains the problem of an unbalanced, obsessive focus on Anne.

In section I, I have explored the oppositional structure that recurs in contemporary and modern historical and literary descriptions of Henry’s first queens. In section II, I will show how

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<sup>36</sup> *Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England: Being a Contemporary Record of Some of the Principal Events of the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI*, trans. by Martin A. Sharp, xv-xvii (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), p. 32; p. 57-58.

defences of women work to create similarities or resonances between them; there are echoes and alliances which build up over time in the language of these defences. For instance, John Aylmer sees Anne as 'an Harborowe for faithfull and trewe subiectes' in his treatise written for Elizabeth in 1599, whilst in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Defence of Good Women*, written in 1540, Katherine is depicted in terms of her charity, her gentleness and her piety.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to Elyot, the most famous of the defences of Anne, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, describes her as 'comitas, modestia, pietatis erga omnes', or 'most beautiful of all in true piety and character'.<sup>38</sup> Foxe praises Anne's support for scholars, charitable activities, and even the nobility of her ladies. I will show that the similarities between all these varied defences have the effect of aligning Katherine with Anne and of undermining the usual oppositional relationship; these contrary women are allied, brought closer, both by popular concerns over their behaviour and also by textual patterns embedded in efforts to defend them.

## II Katherine and Anne Aligned

Defences of women in the sixteenth century are rarely highly individualised; Linda Woodbridge argues, influentially, that the defence itself represents a literary and textual experiment with form that supersedes any serious political intent. She claims that texts such as *The Defence of Good Women*, Robert Vaughn's *A Dyalogue defensynve for women, agaynst malycyous detractours* (published 1542) and Gosynhall's *Mulierum Pean* published in 1557 (or, 'the Praise of all women', a response to his own attack on women *The Scolle House of Women*) were all composed as exercises in genre. Her argument is aided by the fact that most of these writers wrote *both* defences of *and* attacks against women, suggesting that they operate more as textual experiments than as

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<sup>37</sup> John Aylmer, *An harborowe for faithful and trewe subiectes, Agaynst the Late Blowne Blaste, Concerninge the Gouvernmet of Wemen, Wherin be Confuted All Such Reasons as a Straunger of Late Made in that Behalf: With a Brieve Exhortation to Obedience* (London, 1559); Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* (London: 1540, reprinted by EEBO, 2010)

<sup>38</sup> John Foxe, *Rerum in ecclesia gestarum* (Basle, 1559), p. 145.



expressions of personal opinion. All these defences of women outline the chaste virtue and submissive pacifism that constitute feminine qualities. This – in turn – explains the recurrence of the Esther and Griselda stories in discourse of the period. I agree with Woodbridge's argument that defences represent an intellectual exercise, not a personal manifesto; it is clear from defences such as Juan-Luis Vives' *de institutione feminae christianae* ('The Instruction of a Christian Woman') and Elyot's *The Defense of Good Women* which manifest a series of recurring and generic characteristics. If defences of women tell us a great deal about expectations for queenship, they also tell us something about queens themselves. Nevertheless, what Ives calls 'the maleness of history' and limited extant primary sources have ensured that we can see only the concerns of kingship as manifested in treatments of women; their own voices tend to be obscured.<sup>39</sup> I will suggest in this section that the fact that historical and literary sources mute the individual agency of these women has the unforeseen effect of bringing them closer together.

Whilst we cannot, therefore, use defences of Anne or Katherine as useful commentaries about their character, nevertheless they are useful in revealing the extent to which these women are identified with each other. The most famous defence of Anne Boleyn appears in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, whilst useful evidence is also found in *The Life of Queen Anne Boleigne* (c. 1605), written by George Wyatt, grandson of the poet Thomas, whose own relationship with Anne saw him, for a time, imprisoned in the Tower. Both these texts set out to oppose the traditional vision of Katherine as an exemplar of noble queenship seen, for example, in William Forrest's *History of Grisild the Second*. In this section, I will show how defences of these queens describe them both as exemplars of nobility and feminine suffering and this, in turn, suggests a commonality between these two women who are so often opposed.

In his book with the self-explanatory title *Strong Women*, David Wallace argues that in Anne Boleyn's death, in effect, the idealisation of queenly vulnerability is played out to its extreme conclusion:

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<sup>39</sup> Ives, *Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, p. 205.

Anne's beheading is the effective terminus of Chaucerian courtly rhetoric: that is, the moment at which Chaucer's scripting for eloquent queens – surrogates for Anne of Bohemia, who stood between her subjects and her irascible spouse – becomes historically redundant.

Once a king can kill his queen ... we lose the possibility of articulate, wifely mediation.<sup>40</sup>

Notwithstanding Wallace's assertion, we should remember that intercessory queenship does not disappear entirely: it is a clear component of the defences of Katherine and Anne written during Elizabeth's reign and can be seen in various texts written for James I's court and that of his wife Anna of Denmark, as I shall discuss in chapter 4.

Forrest's *The History of Grisild* emphasises Katherine's quietness, her charitable instincts, her connection with her people, her dispensation of comfort to the poor, her pity, her amiability and her 'womanlynes':

For princelye behavyour, nurture, and suche  
 To womanlynes that did appertayne,  
 None myght (certaynely) commende her to muche,  
 She had in that kinde the vearye right veyne;  
 Of her princelye presence all men weare fayne,  
 Not onlye the cheif had suche affection  
 But also the pooare had her in dilection. (29)

Physical beauty is beyond even Forrest's power to invent – he admits, '[s]o perfecte she was not in personage, | But farre perfecter was her inward mynde' – so he emphasises instead the superiority of her mind, her good grace and her piety (27). Katherine repeatedly describes herself as isolated; she says, 'I am come oute of farre countraye', which reminds us of her alienness, her lack of allegiances and her vulnerability, attributes which are especially highlighted in *Henry VIII*, as I shall show later (32).

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<sup>40</sup> David Wallace, *Strong Women*, p. xxiv.

Forrest's text is interesting also for its approach to Anne Boleyn. It describes how the king's concern about Katherine's barrenness led him to replace her: here marriage to Anne comes about as a result of his decision to divorce Katherine; it is not its cause. Unlike Katherine, Anne is:

A fresche younge damoyzell, that cowlde trippe and go,  
 To synge and to daunce passinge excellent,  
 No tatches shee lacked of loves allurements;  
 She cowlde speake Frenche ornatly and playne,  
 Famed in the Cowrte, (by name) Anne Bullayne. (53)

So Anne Boleyn has a popularity in court which is based on her sociability, her frivolity, her accomplishments. Wolsey specifically warns Henry that these qualities make her fit for a concubine, not for a queen; her attributes are purely external. By contrast, his focus is on Katherine's superior *internal* qualities: her wisdom, her thoughtfulness, her 'conscience'. This word recurs in all the major treatments of Katherine because they all share the same intention: to show Katherine as the source of truth, piety and internal purity. Her 'conscience' is the guide for Henry/Walter in Forrest's text but of course Henry's conscience is cloaked in the influence of Satan, so she defends herself in vain. Her final withdrawal from office, the handing over of her crown is seen in terms of graceful resistance, even whilst she never agrees to go quietly:

So made the answeare, this noble woman,  
 At sendynge to her her Crowne to resigne,  
 Withe muche moe reasons then I rehearse can,  
 For she was lightened withe grace dyvyne;  
 But by no maner meanys she wolde incline  
 Her crowne to surrender for weale or woe,  
 Thoughe Walter neuer maligned her so. (84)

In Forrest's text, there is a clear tension between the sympathetic portrayal of Katherine and the portrayal of Henry VIII as villain. Forrest tries to resolve this problem by blaming Satan for

influencing Henry; he describes '[t]he sathanyke serpent, who had in her hate, | But never cowlde her (to this purpose) culpate' (3). Forrest emphasises in his history that the greatest similarity between Katherine and Griselda is their abundance of patience, although there is a tension between his portrayal of Katherine as victim and her resistance. Ultimately, Griselda and Walter are reconciled and so her virtue is rewarded; Vives who is also well known for his advice manuals to women, had recommended in his letters to Katherine about the instruction of Princess Mary (later Mary I) that she read Griselda's story about female stoicism and passive, patient suffering.<sup>41</sup> The Griselda story represents a sense of wish fulfilment, of virtue rewarded, as well as the paradoxical power of silence and submission.

In addition to the association of Katherine with Griselda, we must also note the commonness of depictions of Katherine as vulnerable and foreign. George Cavendish notes her 'broken Englyshe' in his *Life of Wolsey*, while Hall and Foxe show Katherine speaking French, reminding us that she is a foreigner and therefore vulnerable (I have noted similar depictions of Margaret of Anjou as foreign and therefore isolated in chapter 2). Of course, French is more acceptable than her native Spanish because it is less Catholic; by having her speak French, they ensure she is still worthy of sympathy. In Holinshed (as in Shakespeare), when Wolsey comes to Katherine with the charges of the court, he addresses her in Latin and she asks that he speak in the English language which connects her to her people in general and to the witnesses to her trial: 'naie good my lord (quoth she), speake to me in English'.<sup>42</sup> In Foxe and Hall Katherine points out that she is alone; all her friends are in Spain. References to Katherine speaking French rather than Spanish establish a comparison with Anne who was famously educated in the French court (and affected by French manners, according to Forrest, as we saw above). It means they are both 'foreign' to an extent, affected by foreign manners. The Protestant English Anne should be less foreign than Catholic Spanish Katherine, but if they both speak French, they become similarly outsiders. Levin

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<sup>41</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, trans. and ed. by Foster Watson (New York, NY: Longmans, Green & Co, 1912), p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> *Chronicles*, p. 405.

points out that Stowe in his 1605 *Annales* has Katherine claim a degree of Englishness, she says, 'for I can (I thank God) both speake and understand English, although I understand some Latin'.<sup>43</sup> I will show in section III why Shakespeare and Fletcher fully 'English' Katherine: they have her speak English, and also describe her response to allegations in full. In this, they diverge from historiographical precedent with important consequences.

This discussion highlights the 'literary' nature of the historiography of the period; historical truth is not the point (nor is it achievable anyway). We can see, though, the literary technique by which the queen is shown to be either vulnerable or alien – compromised, that is, by foreign allegiance – and there is a fine line between these two readings. Literary depictions of these women provide a clear template for references to the queen's foreignness in the different languages which are attributed to them. George Wyatt will later describe Anne's self-defence with a similar emphasis on the utter isolation of her voice. Although it is clear that she has supporters, they are helpless to act: it was 'muttered abroad, that that spotles Queene in her defence had cleered her self with a most wise and noble speach. Notwithstandinge such a trial, such a judgment found her guiltie'.<sup>44</sup> In short, we have seen that the focus on language as a means of highlighting the queen's integration into the court structure is a recurring feature of depictions of both women. It has the remarkable effect of rendering these women allies against their accusers, alike in both perspective and vulnerability.

The anonymous play *The Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester*, written around 1530, is another allegorical portrait of Katherine of Aragon.<sup>45</sup> Here Hester is prepared in advance of her meeting with the king, as she is 'traded' away to him in marriage by her family. She is described in terms which emphasise her worthiness for marriage to the prince (himself seen as 'ever sure, just, and

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<sup>43</sup> *Annales*, p. 912-13.

<sup>44</sup> George Wyatt, *The Life of The Virtuous, Christian, and Renowned Queen Anne Boleigne* (London: Printed by Richard and Arthur Taylor, 1817), pp. 23-24.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Enterlude of Godly Queen Hester', in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. by Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 410-31. All subsequent references to this edition.

substanciall'), in particular her wisdom and subservience; she is told 'by mekenes for mercye, to temper the fyre | Of rigors justice in fume or in yre' (ll. 180-83). She also described as

[a] pearle undefiled, and of conscience cleare;  
 Sober, sad, jentill, meke, and demure,  
 In learning and litterature, profoundly seene,  
 In wisdom, eke, semblante to Saba the Quene. (255-59)

These characteristics are specifically described by Assuerus, her husband-to-be, as 'vertues that be best and fittest for a queene' (267). The play's description of successful queenship is familiar from other texts; most of its terms have been applied to *both* Katherine *and* her rival. Shakespeare will also portray both women in terms of their 'conscience', as I will show later. The passage above describes Hester's piety, obedience and wisdom. Yet we must remember that Hester supplants the previous queen, so in an important respect she is better associated with Anne than Katherine.

*Enterlude* describes how a king is 'content to bee counselled by the queene', moreover, Hester is left to 'rewle the common weale' when the king is abroad on military business just as Katherine governed England as regent in 1513 while Henry was campaigning in France (278; 286). Hester is the king's equal in wisdom and judgement, 'as many vertues be there muste, | Even in the quene as in the prynce', therefore she provides a perfectly complementary authority (287-88). In other words, the combination of a king and queen ruling *together* increases the stature of the individuals concerned. As a paeon to Katherine, this is important because it suggests that she complements and even improves Henry's kingship; her virtues are not only personal, but political too.

Hester intervenes on behalf of her people on several occasions: she asks for food, for relief from onerous taxation, and most importantly she intervenes to protect her people from the machinations of the evil Aman. The king is weakened by his dependence on an evil counsellor, just as Henry VIII is weakened by Wolsey's influence in the early scenes of *Henry VIII*. Hester demands full punishment for Aman; there is no ritualised plea for mercy or forgiveness here and she completely

rejects his pleas for forgiveness. Hester is given the final words of the play in which we see that intercession by the queen need not *only* be peaceful, which is an interesting twist:

And yet the servantes that bee untrue,  
 A while in the world theyr lyfe may they leade,  
 Yea, theyr welth and worshippe dayly renewe;  
 But at the length, I assure you in dede,  
 Theyr favell and falsehed wyll come abrede,  
 Whiche shall be to them more bytter than gall.  
 The hygher they clyme, the deper they fall. (1162-68)

Hester's words show that intercession is not the only responsible way to exercise queenly influence. In Shakespeare's play, Katherine echoes Hester's words when she warns the king about the malign influence of outside counsel on his better conscience early in the play. She takes on this explicitly political function, warning him, 'Tongues spit their duties out, and cold hearts freeze | Allegiance in them. Their curses now | Live where their prayers did'.<sup>46</sup> In informing Henry about Wolsey's unpopular taxation schemes in that play she is clearly warning that they are doing untold damage to his subjects' lives but also to their love for their king.

We have seen evidence of an ongoing textual conversation about queens' political and public authority, but sometimes we see a distinction between female and queenly agency. Mary, queen dowager of Hungary, wrote to Emperor Charles in 1555 to explain why she voluntarily laid aside her regency, saying, 'a woman is never feared or respected as a man is, whatever her rank ... in times of war ... it is entirely impossible for a woman to govern satisfactorily. All she can do is shoulder responsibility for mistakes committed by others'.<sup>47</sup> As queen she must fulfil her sovereign

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<sup>46</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, ed. by Gordon McMullan, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 3' (London: Routledge, 2000), I.2.61-63. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>47</sup> PR Office, Queen Dowager of Hungary to the Emperor, August 1555, *CSP (Spanish)*, Philip and Mary, July 1554 - Nov 1558 (London, 1894), 13: 248, trans. by Judith M. Richards in 'To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule: Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28. 1, 101-21 (p. 103).

duties and yet, as she acknowledges, an assertion of political and, especially, military agency by a queen is complex and risky because it threatens male prerogative *in public*. Whilst female agency can be manifested in private and is therefore controllable, queen's agency is harder to circumscribe.

Edward Hall shows how Katherine of Aragon's public speech deliberately emphasises her vulnerability (Shakespeare directly quotes these words in *Henry VIII*). She says,

I am a woman, and lacke wytte and learnyng to aunswere to them, but to God I commit the iudgmet of that, whether thei haue done iustly or percially ... I will abyde tyll the cowrte of Rome, which was preuy to the begynnyng, haue made therof a determinacion, and finall endyng.<sup>48</sup>

I want to emphasise here that this statement of submission and of weakness still paradoxically shows a determination on Katherine's part to fight for her own position. Her words resound with dignity and with a strong sense of her own rectitude; there are echoes here of Griselda's earlier assertion of power using silence and submission. Interestingly too they mirror Wyatt's defence of Anne, where he asserts that the 'spotless queen in her defence had cleared herself with a most wise and noble speech' (448). Vives' *Instruction of a Christen Woman* tells us that 'a woman hath no charge to se to but her honestie and chastyte. Wherefore whan she is enfurmed of that she is sufficientlie appoynted'.<sup>49</sup> It is clear from this passage that Vives is in favour of an essentially private style of female influence. Whilst queens can perform an important and proactive role in governance of the country, they must still frame that role in supplementary terms to avoid the kind of criticism we saw with respect to Margaret of Anjou. This controversy about acceptable forms of queenship continued to rage in the years leading up to the death of Edward VI and in the succession problems that increasingly pointed towards the first queen regnant.

Sir David Lyndsey's *The Monarche, or Ane Dialog betwix Experience and ane Courteour* written in 1554 offers another example of this expectation of subservience:

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<sup>48</sup> *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 781.

<sup>49</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *Preface to Instruction of a Christen Woman*, ed. by Charles Fantazzi (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 42.



All women, in thare degree,  
 Suld to thar men subiectit be.  
 Quhowbeit, sum yit will stryve for stait,  
 And for the maistrye mak debait,  
 Quhilk gyf that want, beith ewin and morrow  
 Thare men wyll suffer mekle sorrow.<sup>50</sup>

The key here is the first line with its reference to all women *in thare degree*. I have already discussed some of the ways in which prominent female figures are criticised and condemned for usurping male power – we can see here an especial concern about ‘maistrye’, about control as a particularly ‘male’ characteristic. Lyndsey goes on to insist that there is ‘no way I can commend Women for tyll be to manlye, | Nor men tyll be womanlye’.<sup>51</sup> In other words, men who lose full sovereignty over women become less than manly (I have already shown several texts which describe Margaret of Anjou in remarkably similar terms). We have seen how Forrest defends Katherine but avoids the kind of explicitly political criticism of the king which we see in *The Monarche* by allegorising her story. In exchanging Katherine for Griselda he follows a long tradition of defences of women which praise their passive or reactive nature, and their mediatory influence over the king. I have shown above how various commentators see religious virtue, chastity and obedience as the most important aspects of the queen’s character. I have already discussed generic similarities as well as the literariness of these defences in the Tudor period: a few final examples will help us understand the extent to which defences of Anne and Katherine take on similar forms.

We saw earlier that John Foxe described Anne as ‘most beautiful of all in true piety and character’. Beauty in piety and character are obviously definitions of good queenship; Forrest used similar terms when describing Katherine’s noble support for scholarship and her charitable

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<sup>50</sup> Sir David Lyndsey, *The Monarche, or Ane Dialog betwixt Experience and ane Courteour*, ed. by J. Small, F. Hall and J. A. H. Murray (London: Early English Text Society, 1865), lines 1068-73.

<sup>51</sup> *The Monarche*, 3235-7.

activities.<sup>52</sup> Foxe famously hails Anne as ‘the crop and root’ of the Reformation, whom ‘God had imbued with wisdom that she could, and given her the mind that she would, do it’, and in the 1583 version of *Acts and Monuments* he adds her intercession with Henry on behalf of an heretic, Thomas Padmore.<sup>53</sup> So the queen is judged on the basis of her piety and her religious virtue. In 1573, John Bridges describes her as ‘a most holy martyr’ and in his *Cronickille of Anne Bulleyne*, William Latymer offers a similar image of Anne as ‘godly’ and ‘vertuous’.<sup>54</sup> Wyatt’s *Life of Anne Boleigne* echoes many of these concerns. It represents a deliberate effort to reply to Sander’s slanderous account of Anne in *The Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism* which, as we saw in section I, focused on her sexual depravity and alleged incest.

Here, Wyatt draws a picture of a romantic, idealised relationship between his grandfather Sir Thomas Wyatt and Anne and he describes the young Anne as showing ‘the graces of nature graced by gracious education’ (423). This vision of ‘grace’ as divine and natural again fits in closely with what we have seen in depictions of Katherine. Wyatt describes Anne as ‘sweet and cheerful, nobly presented’ and he sees in her ‘mildness and majesty more than can be expressed’ (424). The king, moreover, is described as falling in love with Anne ‘both for the better quietness of his *conscience* [my italics], and for more sure settling of the succession to more prosperous issue’ (425). So for Wyatt, Anne represents not the carnal temptress who seduces the king and manoeuvres him into marrying her, but a feature of his responsible management of his kingdom; the resolution to a political problem as well as a religious inspiration. Furthermore, in *Life of Anne Boleigne*, Anne has a vision which pronounced ‘certain destruction if she married the king’ (429). Since she marries Henry knowing that it will be the cause of her death, her action becomes one of bravery, virtuous self-sacrifice and a patriotic desire to serve the best interests of her king and country. Her premonition

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Forrest describes a ‘syngular zeale unto learnynge, | As bothe in Oxforde and Cambrygde was seene, | In mayntaynyng lectures, and Scholars helpeinge’; she is a ‘worthy woman’ who cannot but display a ‘noble grace’, *The History of Grisild*, p. 48.

<sup>53</sup> *Acts and Monuments*, viii, p. 546.

<sup>54</sup> John Bridges, *The Supremacie of Christen Princes* (London, 1573), p. 853; William Latymer, *The Cronickille of Anne Bulleyne* ed. by Maria Dowling, Camden Miscellany XXX, Camden 4th Ser., 39 (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1990), p. 64.

aligns her with the allegorical figures of Esther and Griselda, the recurring figures of noble self-sacrifice that we have seen used repeatedly in depictions of Katherine of Aragon. Anne's vision of the future also compares in many ways to Katherine's vision in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, to which I will return in section III. The overriding theme of the *Life of Anne Boleigne* is its emphasis on loyalty, faith and obedience.

Wyatt also subverts the hostile versions of Anne as lustful and a sexual adventuress by portraying her sensuality as a manifestation of her loyalty to Henry. He describes how 'her mind brought him forth the rich treasures of love of piety, love of truth, love of learning. Her body yielded him the fruits of marriage, inestimable pledges of her faith and loyal love .... Of her time it is found by good observation, that no one suffered for religion' (438). So Anne's mind and body together manifest her chastity and her piety, and her influence over Henry is specifically seen as godly. Wyatt goes on in the same passage to describe how Anne's petitioning brings Henry into contact with the controversial reforming text, Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* (438). Therefore, whilst her role in the Reformation is intermediary, it is nonetheless critical. In almost identical terms to those used by Foxe in *Acts and Monuments* but also in texts which defend Katherine, Wyatt praises the queen's piety, the nobility of her ladies, and her virtuous reputation. Allegations against her are attributed to a Popish conspiracy and they are 'partly incredible', partly 'by the circumstances impossible' (445). In this source, Anne dies an heroic death.

A closer look at their correspondence with Wolsey reveals further parallels between these two queens; it reveals their similar dependence on him. Katherine writes to Wolsey:

I am moste bonde to pray, for I do know the great paines and trowbles that you have taken for me bothe day and nyght is never like to be recompensyd on my part, but allonly in loving you next on to the kinges grace above all creatures leveng; and I do not doubt but the dayly

proffes of my deades shall manesfestly declaer and aferme my wryteng to be trewe, and I do truste you do thynke the same.<sup>55</sup>

In this letter she is writing for news from the Papal legate, hoping to hear that the Pope confirms the legality of her marriage to Henry and therefore that she will remain queen (Wolsey's failure to secure the annulment leads indirectly to his own fall too; their fates are *also* tied to one another).

Anne's letter is strikingly similar, she says:

I am most bownd my humble thanks for the gret payn and travelle that your grace doth take in steudyng by your wysdome and gret dylygens how to bryng to pas honerably the gretyst welth that is possyble to come to any creator lyving, and in especyall remembryng howe wretchyd and unworthy I am in comparyng to his hyghnes.<sup>56</sup>

The important thing to note about these letters, in addition to the deferential tone, is the sense of dependency, of pleading; both these queens highlight their powerlessness and their political dependence on Wolsey. The petitioning is deliberately humble and complimentary towards Wolsey even though he was friend to neither. It shows both queens as courtiers, dependent on the councillor's mediation with the king, and it shows how narrowly confined is a queen's ability to act independently.

I have argued in this section that although there is great variety in depictions of Anne and Katherine they are not always shown in opposition to one another; on the contrary, there are very pronounced parallels in the defences of these women which have proliferated over time. George Wyatt depicts chaste and pious virtue in his descriptions of Anne. So do Forrest and others in their defences of Katherine, as I have shown. The real point is that the generic requirements of defences of women compel a variety of pro and anti-Anne writers to echo one another, which in turn works to suggest similarities between their subjects' condition. This, in turn, leads us to consider the extent to which *any* portrayals of queenship can be separated out from the 'literariness' of the tropes which

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<sup>55</sup> 'Queen Katherine to Cardinal Wolsey' (1527), London, British Library, MS Cotton, Vitell, fol. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Anne Boleyn to Cardinal Wolsey quoted in Richard Fiddes, *Life of Cardinal Wolsey, 1671-1725*, reprinted London: Hardpress Publishing, 2013), p. 256.

are used to describe them. In *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare returned to writing history after a ten year gap yet clearly the play's vision is of history that is fluid, subject to revisions, assumptions, distortions. In section III I shall argue that the play takes to a logical conclusion those techniques of defence that I explored above even while it challenges its audience's assumptions about queenship, about Katherine, Anne and even Henry. I will examine in more detail the literary techniques at work in the portrayal of queens in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* as I seek to demonstrate how – and why – the play conflates Henry's first two controversial queens.

### III Shakespeare's conflation of Henry's first two queens

In this section, I will show how *Henry VIII* examines and subverts expectations about Katherine *and* Anne: in this play, Katherine is described as 'queen of earthly queens', yet also Anne is 'an angel'. I will consider how *Henry VIII* manifests *both* conflation and opposition at the same time, causing a dramatic problem which is never really resolved. It is well known that *Henry VIII* is heavily indebted to Holinshed's *Chronicles* and also Stowe's 1592 *Annales* (which makes important changes from Holinshed) for its portrait of Wolsey. The real question here is what do Shakespeare and Fletcher add that is unique and, more importantly, why? My intention here is not to assess the historical accuracy of the play but to question how it uses and subverts its sources, asking how it presents controversial and active queenship in the light of the pre-existing literary traditions I have discussed. I will show how *Henry VIII* challenges the usual story of opposition by building on the language of the defences of women analysed in section II; I will find, contrary to expectation, a surprising alignment or equivalency between the two women.

In *Political Shakespeare*, Jonathan Dollimore influentially argued that 'Renaissance drama was a political activity'.<sup>57</sup> In his reading of *Henry VIII*, repeating cycles of rising and falling fortunes hidden in its plot of succession, obstruction and political ambition (Buckingham, Wolsey, Katherine

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<sup>57</sup> Dollimore, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 125.

and even Henry swing between success and dejection) reach a final resolution in Cranmer's prophecy.<sup>58</sup> Dollimore suggests that the fulfilment of Cranmer's prophecy contrasts particularly sharply with Shakespeare's earlier histories, most obviously *Henry V* which ends with warnings about discord and disunity. In other words, he argues, *Henry VIII* offers a kind of Tillyardian providentialist end to history; its final resolution. The fulfilment of the prophecy, of course, is King James. *Henry VIII* may have been composed to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, a public political statement intended to assert Jacobean success and longevity after the death of Prince Henry less than a year earlier. Many critics have, like Dollimore, seen the cyclical troubles of *Henry VIII* as finally resolved in the fulfilment of dynastic hopes under James and the political union of England and Scotland. But it is worth remembering that the play is full of untruths, which suggest it is a play about character, not about history; Shakespeare and Fletcher dramatise gaps or limitations in our historical knowledge even whilst they subtitle the play *All is True*.

In her landmark essay on the play, Lee Bliss cautions against understanding it simply as an expression of Christian myth, or as history *redeemed* by myth; a myth that depends on a vision of King Henry as virtuous and idealised.<sup>59</sup> She has shown that this myth of Henry is not the entire truth of the play, any more than its historical commentary. Henry's will becomes more intractable as Wolsey's power fails. The play's divorce hearing takes place *after* he has already secretly married Anne; Henry takes back control of the course of events even whilst he notionally asks for guidance from Rome. Even Cranmer's escape from the plotters in Act 5 is resolved not by proof of law or reason, but because of the capricious intervention of the king. In other words, we see justice in this play as personal and arbitrary, entirely dependent on the will of the king. Bliss does not deny that favourable views of Henry do exist within the framework of the play, but she reminds us that those favourable views are not allowed to stand unchallenged. I will show how this ambivalence applies also to the portrayal of Henry's two queens.

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<sup>58</sup> Dollimore, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 125.

<sup>59</sup> Lee Bliss, 'The Wheel of Fortune and the Maiden Phoenix of Shakespeare's *King Henry the Eighth*', *ELH*, 42.1 (Spring, 1975), 1-25.

Shakespeare and Fletcher's audience would likely have already seen King Henry VIII on stage in Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* which was written in 1605. The opening scenes of Rowley's play dissects the usual idea of Henry as predominantly concerned with the production of a royal heir; on the contrary, in this play, Henry chooses to sacrifice the life of his unborn child in order to save his queen, Jane Seymour. He tells his courtiers, 'let the childe die; let the Mother liue, | Heavens powerfull hand may more children giue'.<sup>60</sup> Yet Jane insists that the child be spared at the cost of her own life – which conveniently spares Henry his noble sacrifice. In *When You See Me*, the king refers to his son as the 'ninth henrie to the English Crowne', which would encourage its audience to recognise Henry Prince of Wales as that future Henry IX, an heir to an heroic and idealised Henry VIII. Henry in Rowley's play is a glorious king but he also has an imposing will; Jane describes an 'awful majesty', and Katherine later talks of his 'wrathful spleen'.<sup>61</sup> Rowley's mythologised king stands in stark contrast to the vacillating Henry of *Henry VIII* whose lack of an heir and dependence on Wolsey imply sexual performance issues and weakness from the start. Gordon McMullan has discussed a 'crisis of masculinity' represented by the king in the later play; he sees Henry's famous conscience speech as highly feminised – Henry's conscience is 'prick'd' – and argues that the king's need for an heir 'causes him a kind of phantom pregnancy'.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, in the figure of Katherine Parr, Henry's last queen, Rowley's play portrays a queenship whose power is based in intellectual ability and ideology rather than solely in reproduction. As Kim H. Noling has argued, 'the most thoroughly realised queen of *When You See Me*, is she who is most removed from the business of providing Tudor heirs'.<sup>63</sup> In this play Katherine Parr is explicitly described as Lutheran, and Henry is proud of her learning; again, it becomes clear that this is a far more intellectually

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<sup>60</sup> Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me You Know Me* (London: 1605), Scene 2.

<sup>61</sup> *When You See Me You Know Me*, Scene 2.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon McMullan, 'Thou Hast Made Me Now a Man: Reforming Man(ner)liness in *Henry VIII*', in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings*, ed. by Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 40-57 (p. 46).

<sup>63</sup> Kim H. Noling, 'Women's Wit and Woman's Will in *When You See Me You Know Me*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 15.2 (Spring 1993), 327-42 (p. 338).

confident character than we will see at least in the early parts of *Henry VIII*, where the king's will is subject to Wolsey's.

The political role of the later play differs significantly, as its Prologue tells the audience upfront, 'I come no more to make you laugh'. The Prologue makes a claim for the seriousness and grandeur of history in the following passage:

[T]hings now  
That bear a weighty and a serious brow,  
Sad, high and working, full of state and woe,  
Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow,  
We now present.<sup>64</sup>

This passage sums up the concerns of the play: the 'serious' issues of state, but also the tragic artifice, the 'noble scenes' that are likely to stimulate an emotional response, not purely an intellectual one. It sets out to show a 'weighty and serious' matter but also a 'scene', an artificial construct, a creation by a playwright for the entertainment of his audience. In this way, the Prologue highlights wider concerns about historical accuracy, about the literary portrayal of 'history', about the didactic nature of literature and the political bias embedded in the historical versions. The Prologue's claims for the value of its particular rendering of history clearly insist upon its contemporary political importance: 'Think ye see | The very persons of our noble story | *As they were living*' (my italics, Prologue 25-7). This passage is strikingly similar to Nashe's comments about Talbot in *1 Henry VI* which I discussed in chapter 2.<sup>65</sup> Like the *Henry VI* plays, *Henry VIII* not only presents the past as the present but it contains an explicitly political message; its version of history, in other words, is in fact a political debate about the present.

We saw earlier that in *Hall's Chronicle*, Katherine's foreignness is marked: she speaks French which has the effect of isolating her. That Anne Boleyn also speaks French is mentioned in most

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<sup>64</sup> *Henry VIII*, Prologue 1-5.

<sup>65</sup> The audience would be able to view 'brave Talbot (the terror of the French)' and 'imagine they behold him fresh bleeding', *Piers Penniless*, page 60.



sources ranging from Forrest's *Life of Grisild* to Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. In Holinshed, Wolsey speaks to Katherine in Latin but she specifically asks that she might respond in English.<sup>66</sup> In other words, she takes back control of her own performance. In Shakespeare and Fletcher, she speaks plain English because she wants her audience to understand her; she sets herself up as a mouthpiece for the truth; she says that 'the truth loves open dealing' (III.1.39). The point is that Shakespeare and Fletcher are making use of an existing literary tradition but also making substantial changes to it. By fully 'Englishing' Katherine, *Henry VIII* makes her the focal point of the entire play. Contemporary productions tend to give Katherine the hint of an accent to emphasise her Spanishness but this is a misunderstanding of how she is presented in the play. As in earlier sources, she is seen here lobbying for the poor and victims of injustice and oppression, stressing her merciful nature and femininity. Several scenes confirm a vision of her as poor and oppressed, and she is always seen as serious in her efforts to defend the wellbeing of her people. She tells the king:

Sir, I do desire you do me right and justice,  
And to bestow your pity on me, for  
I am a most poor woman and a stranger,  
Born out of your dominions. (II.4.11-4)

Here Katherine articulates her sense of isolation, of vulnerability and weakness but she gains real power precisely through that submissiveness and vulnerability.

By ensuring that she speaks plain English, she moves beyond the formality of her role as queen, deliberately diminishing her stature to that of wife and dependent; the equal of those attendants who are witnesses to the scene. She is also described as 'saint-like' in her endurance, and also her 'wife-like government' (II.4.135). Matthew C. Hansen has argued compellingly that the play operates as another conduct book for Englishwomen, with Katherine as its heroine; he argues that

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<sup>66</sup> Kim Noling argues that Shakespeare's Wolsey attempts to speak to her in Latin not to highlight her foreignness but to distance her from her immediate audience of her serving women in 'Grubbing up the Stock: Dramatising Queens in *Henry VIII*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39.3 (Autumn, 1988), 291-306 (p. 297).

this play offers a didacticism that is absent from Shakespeare's earlier histories. This might explain why Shakespeare now chooses to 'revive' the reputation of Katherine and to use her as his vessel for the portrayal of virtue.<sup>67</sup> The sympathetic vision of this famously Catholic woman is controversial given that the play was composed in 1613 under a firmly Protestant monarch; it clearly shows Shakespeare actively interrogating our expectations of history and also of changing allegiances, just as he had in the *Henry VI* plays thirty years earlier. Griffith's words to her, '[n]oble madam, | Men's evil manners live in brass, their virtues | We write in water', express the concern that history, virtuous and evil, is prejudiced by the very process of recording it (IV.2.44-46).

In its early scenes, Katherine is described in similar terms to those we have seen in William Forrest and *The Enterlude of Godly Queen Hester* amongst others. Henry tells her '[y]ou have half our power, | The other moiety ere you ask is given' (I.2.11-12); a familiar trope of intercessory queenship, but there is also an important emphasis on her political role; her contact with her people is described as extensive (and is original to the play) as she says herself, 'I am solicited – not by a few' (I.2.18). Whilst many of the earlier treatments of Katherine do show her intervening with the king on behalf of the poor, we see in *Henry VIII* a power that is not just intercessory. The queen displays *more than* half the king's power; she shows real political initiative, and a nuanced understanding of the political ramifications of Henry's alienation of his people. Significantly, too, neither the king nor Wolsey has this intuitive connection with the people. Katherine works with and echoes Norfolk, the king's most reliable advisor, saying 'it almost appears in loud rebellion', which he changes to 'it *doth* appear'. She clearly is connected both to the king's noble advisors, and to the people. We should note the sarcasm and contempt contained in her words of warning about Norfolk's bad policy:

the pretence for this

Is named your wars in France. This makes bold mouths:

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<sup>67</sup> Matthew C. Hansen, 'The 'Englishing' of Catherine of Aragon in Sixteenth-Century English Literary and Chronicle History', in *High and Mighty Queens*, pp. 79-101 (p. 95).

Tongues spit their duties out, and cold hearts freeze

Allegiance in them. (I.2.59-62)

In this scene, Katherine is educating and directing her king; by contrast, he appears inept, incompetent, lacking authority. By chastising him she takes on a doubly maternal role, protecting both the king and his people. Katherine's words contain a clear resistance, a warning about a sudden dislocation of sympathy and love that will result in defiance. If 'tongues spit their duties out', she warns, then reluctant defiance may easily become active rebellion.

In this scene Katherine is the only voice of moderation and reason: she articulates nobility as a moral idea, not a birthright. This scene leads directly to the introduction of Anne Boleyn in a scene full of double entendres and suggestions of sexual questing and a sexually liberal court, obviously 'Frenchified' in terms of dress, behaviour and language. During her first meeting with Henry, Anne is silent. She is selected by him, described by the Chamberlain and by the king, talked about but not speaking or even spoken to. She is still, at this point, a fairly anonymous courtier. That her first scene is juxtaposed between Katherine's defence of nobility and Buckingham's heroic death is significant because it connects these two types of heroism. Buckingham's death sentence and the response to it contains several references to 'noble patience', to 'conscience' and to 'justice'. His efforts to die a good death form part of a chivalric ideal, but they also reference the famous stoicism of Anne's own 'good' death. Buckingham's description of a 'long divorce of steel' foreshadows both Katherine's *and* Anne's fate, a divorce of soul and of body, unifying them directly by casting a dark shadow of violence over them.

Another reference to 'conscience' comes in the first discussion of Henry's putative divorce from Katherine. Norfolk describes the idea of divorce as Wolsey's doing:

For now he [Wolsey] has cracked the league

Between us and the Emperor, the Queen's great nephew,

He dives into the King's soul and there scatters

Dangers, doubts, wringing of the conscience,

Fears and despairs - and all these for his marriage. (II.2.23-27)

I have already noted that references to 'conscience' recur throughout the play but the only person whose conscience does *not* appear a significant driver of behaviour is Wolsey. Of course, this spares him from the potential hypocrisy that comes from professing one thing and performing another. We also see later in the description of Henry's desire for Anne the explicit equation of conscience with sexual desire. A gentleman reports: 'Our King has all the Indies in his arms, | And more, and richer, when he strains that Lady. | I cannot blame his conscience' (IV.1.45-47). Unexpectedly, Henry describes Katherine, too, in sexual terms. In Act II, he says, '[w]ould it not grieve an able man to leave | So sweet a bedfellow?' (II.2.140-41). This is unusual; commonly depictions of Katherine, as I have shown, rely on her piety and her moral virtue. None of the original sources ever consider her as a sexual partner for Henry; explicitly sensuous femininity is identified with Anne in sources, not Katherine. The description of Katherine's sexual appeal to Henry allies her with what the reader knows of Anne. Both these women are physically desirable and both of them share the same appeal to Henry; the desire for normal conjugal habits. Yet the scene is followed immediately by Anne's entrance, saying '[n]ot for that, neither' – which, given the rapidity of scene changes on the Jacobean stage, might well sound like a flat contradiction of Henry's assertion that his conscience is troubling him ('conscience, conscience', he says, just as Anne enters the stage, II.3.141). Equally surprising in this play, Anne is explicitly supportive of Katherine, both personally and as queen. As we saw in respect of her earlier intercession, Katherine is at the moral centre of the play. When Anne Boleyn says '[b]y my troth and maidenhead, I would not be a queen', she equates moral truth with virginity (and also female sexual organs) (II.3.23-24). The moral certainties of Katherine become aligned with Anne too because they relate to the sexual relationships *both* these women have with Henry.

We cannot, however, fail to notice that the play also manifests revulsion, or at least a sense of imminent threat, at the sexual influence that Anne has over Henry. This is clear in Anne's first scene with the Old Lady with its juxtaposition of queen and whore, and its knowing references to

‘bowed’ versus bawd. The scene contains a joke about how Anne will secure her sovereignty via her body; a riposte to the emphasis on nobility and heredity of the earlier scene between Katherine and Buckingham. There have been several suggestions that the character of the Old Lady may be derived from Rojas’ *Celestina*.<sup>68</sup> Anne Gill suggests that Shakespeare is likely to have read *Celestina* because he knew its English translator, and also that ‘knowledge of *Celestina*, whether in English translation or not, was current amongst London’s dramatists at the end of the sixteenth century’.<sup>69</sup> Actually I think the anonymous *Spanish Chronicle* is the more likely prototype for Shakespeare’s Old Lady because it depicts a wily old lady who enables Anne’s sexual adventures, and secures her a supply of young men to satisfy her. The Old Lady here is an agent of discord and ambivalence; her final threat to deny any resemblance between Anne’s baby and its father explicitly introduces the possibility of Elizabeth’s illegitimacy. Of course sovereignty is secured by heredity, which is in turn dependent on female fertility and Anne secures power by offering Henry the potential for male succession, something which Katherine clearly cannot do. But the audience is always aware that the line will end with Elizabeth; female fertility is as problematic as it is desirable.

The transactional nature of the process of securing a queen and thereby securing the future of the kingdom is clearly marked by Henry’s first gift to Anne; one thousand pounds and the title of marchioness of Pembroke. Of course, from this point onwards, the king has a claim on her. The entire scene is punctuated by words denoting the nature of the trade with its references to ‘more’, ‘less’, ‘everything’ and ‘nothing’. Anne herself says ‘more than my all is nothing’ (II.3.67).

Shakespeare’s recent play *The Winter’s Tale*, first performed in May 1611, offers an interesting comparison piece given its similar treatment of sexual disgust and fear about the corrosive power of

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<sup>68</sup> For example, Nicholas G. Round, ‘Rojas’ Old Bawd and Shakespeare’s Old Lady: *Celestina* and Anglican Reformation’, *Celestinesca*, 21 (1997), 93-110. The two scenes in which the Old Lady appears in *Henry VIII* are universally agreed to have been written by Shakespeare; their authorship is not problematic.

<sup>69</sup> Anne Gill, “‘Celestina the baude mother of all noughtynes’: template for the early modern bawd?”, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Kings College London, 2007), pp. 143-148

female sexuality.<sup>70</sup> In that play, Leontes rages, '[m]y wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings, | If this be nothing'.<sup>71</sup> Both plays associate 'nothing' with vagina and specifically with transgressive female sexuality. In *Henry VIII*, Anne tells her sovereign, 'prayers and wishes | Are all I can return' (II.3.69-70), but of course what she can actually secure is safe succession for the kingdom, the one thing Leontes suspects is not possible because of his wife's adultery. In *Henry VIII*, the scene immediately shifts from the vision of Anne's humility directly to Katherine's, an elision which conflates their roles as equally subservient; they are both part of a transaction which they themselves cannot influence.

Katherine tells Henry '[h]eaven witness | I have been to you a true and humble wife | At all times to your will conformable, | Ever in fear to kindle your dislike' (II.4.20-23). In this passage Katherine defines her wifely role and also the expectations of a good queen; vulnerability and passivity is her definition of good queenship. She remarks on her isolation, her vulnerability and her dependence on the king, although I have shown that she has more political power than she lays claim to here. A queen usually relies on a network of foreign alliances which are made possible through the political union of king and queen. This caused serious problems for Margaret of Anjou as we saw; I discussed in an earlier chapter how the marriage of Henry VI to Margaret of Anjou failed in its function to bring peace because it was perceived to be an unequal trade. Here Katherine repeatedly reminds us that she is not English, telling her audience, '[w]ould I had never trod this English Earth | Or felt the flatteries that grow upon it. | Ye have angels' faces, but heaven knows your hearts' (III.1.143-45). In Katherine's case, by remarking on her loneliness, her isolation, her vulnerability and in pointing out that her friends and family and networks of power are far away, she paradoxically highlights those familial ties that made her an attractive prospect for queen in the first place.

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<sup>70</sup> On the dating of *The Winter's Tale*, see Jennifer Richards and James Knowles, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare's Late Plays*, ed. by Richards and Knowles, pp. 1-21 (p. 1).

<sup>71</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by J. H. P. Pafford, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 2' (London: Routledge, 1962), I.2.295-96.

I discussed in my chapter on Margaret and Guenevere how the debate about women's public and private responsibility highlights critics' concerns about the patriarchal traffic in women. This traffic, which uses the control and trade of women as a designator of masculinity, has the common effect of rendering women mute; Pierre Bourdieu describes how they become 'liquid assets, capable of earning symbolic wealth'.<sup>72</sup> In other words, a woman's political function depends on her exchange value between men. Anne is often described in terms relating to trade and transaction. Katherine detaches herself from that value here, because by asserting her own compliance she actually is offering a resistance to it. That resistance is, admittedly, short lived, but it is important nevertheless. Katherine says of herself, '[w]e are a queen, or long have dreamed so' (II.4.69); her station as wife and her political role have both melted away, but she still resists efforts to silence her. She remains 'the daughter of a king'; her defiance and her resistance remain clear despite the isolation in which she still finds herself, as she concludes, 'my drops of tears | I'll turn to sparks of fire' (II.4.70-71). Here feminine pity which should inspire tears becomes transformed into something more assertive, more resilient. So she uses a ritualised depiction of women as meek and passive, saying 'I am a simple woman, much too weak | [t]'oppose your cunning', but at the same time she sums up more than anyone else in the play the crisis of Henry's kingship (II.4.104-5).

Katherine tells him:

[y]ou're meek and humble-mouthed;  
 You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,  
 With meekness and humility; but your heart  
 Is crammed with arrogancy, spleen and pride. (II.4.104-8)

Later she describes herself as '[s]hipwrecked upon a kingdom where no pity, | No friend, no hope, no kindred weep for me, | Almost no grave allow'd me'; she is forced to redefine her position because she no longer recognises herself without her crown and the comfort and companionship it

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<sup>72</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 115.

brings (III.1.149-51). But then at the end of Act IV, she storms out, violently taking back the authority over the scene, physically asserting her resistance to the silencing efforts of Henry and his court.

In the courtroom scene, Act III Scene 1, Katherine claims that English is the language of truth; she wants witnesses to understand her plight and her resistance, and her plea for the court to be conducted in English contains an important political comment. She wants an informal court, one that is accessible to the people that she represents; she is allied with her people, who become witnesses to Henry's false claims. She asks that she be judged in the language of her people, saying, '[t]he willingest sin I ever yet committed | May be absolved in English' (III.1.48-49). Katherine shows considerable political sophistication; at the same time as she asserts her Englishness she also claims that her foreignness renders her friendless and vulnerable:

[t]hey that must weigh out my afflictions,  
 They that my trust must grow to, live not here:  
 They are, as are all my other comforts, far hence  
 In mine own country' (III.1.88-91).

In this scene she directly equates herself with Griselda, which of course casts Henry in Walter's role as a figure of immoderate and unreasonable behaviour persecuting a chaste, modest wife. Katherine concludes, '[n]othing but death | Shall e'er divorce my dignities' (III.1.141-42). Her point here is that death and divorce are interchangeable. We see that the two women (the divorced and the dead) will become interchangeable in their failure to resist the will of the king. Henry's divorce as a political resolution to Katherine's barrenness and his desire for Anne to resolve the political problem caused by that barrenness effectively conflates the two women by rendering them both as vessels for the affirmation of successful patriarchal power.

Shakespeare and Fletcher use their sources directly in their dramatisation of female defiance and resistance in *Henry VIII*. Much of Katherine's speech is derived verbatim from Hall; for example, her dignified response to the verdict of the French universities that her marriage was invalid: 'I am a woman and lacke wit. [...] I am his lawfull wyfe, and to hym lawfully maryed, and by the order of



holye Church I was to hym espoused as his true wyfe'.<sup>73</sup> We can see how closely Shakespeare follows his sources at key moments; in *Henry VIII* Katherine capitulates saying, '[y]ou know I am a woman, lacking wit' (III.1.177). She is at this point simply a woman; simple, vulnerable, unsophisticated, everything that she was not when she was queen. What is remarkable in this scene is Henry's admiration of her behaviour; he even repeats her own words with reference to 'meekness', and he emphasises her obedience, her loyalty, her piety and also her sovereignty. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Henry is in her shadow.

Ruth Vanita has discussed the parallels between women in Shakespeare's late plays who gain moral authority even as they are persecuted (she examines *Henry VIII* alongside *The Winter's Tale*).<sup>74</sup> We might add, too, the similarity of these two plays' presentation of female 'performance': both Katherine and Hermione present themselves as dramatic constructs and representatives of universal truth and virtue. For example, in her final interview with Wolsey, Katherine re-inscribes herself as the voice of reason, of truth; she represents a frank openness and transparency in stark contrast with Wolsey who primarily operates in private. In the context of plays which are riven with ambivalence and ambiguities this, I think, is the real reason for the unconventional treatment of Katherine of Aragon. Many critics have noted the heroism of Katherine's predicament and her resistance to her fate. But what has not been properly understood is the extent to which her performance is political. *Henry VIII* deliberately makes it hard for the audience to distinguish between fact and fiction, and its multiple masques and processions imply that history is dependent on popular memory. Like Shakespeare's earlier histories, the entire play in some sense could be seen as emphasising the unknowable and unreliable nature of history and character. *Henry VIII's* deliberate re-positioning of Katherine and her appropriation of many of the virtues more usually attributed to the Protestant Anne make this clear.

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<sup>73</sup> *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 781.

<sup>74</sup> Ruth Vanita, 'Mariological Memory in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 14.2 (Spring, 2000), 311-37.

Katherine's Catholicism is seen as truthful and honest because of her resistance to the old church as it is represented by Wolsey and the anti-Catholic Bishop of Salisbury, Lorenzo Campeggio, or Campeius as he is known in *Henry VIII*, and her dream vision also confirms her as godly. And yet it is likely that her vision is derived from reports of the vision of Marguerite de Angoulême, Duchess of Alençon and Queen of Navarre.<sup>75</sup> Wolsey wanted Marguerite for Henry; in *Henry VIII* he says '[i]t shall be to the Duchess of Alençon, | The French king's sister: he shall marry her. | Anne Bullen? No, I'll no Anne Bullens for him' (III.2.85-87). Marguerite is named as a rival for Katherine whilst in the attribution of the vision she was also directly connected to her. E. E. Duncan Jones has discussed how the only source for the vision is a funeral oration published in French and Latin in 1555 which describes Marguerite's death as heralded by a dream in which she saw 'une tres-belle femme tenante en sa main une couron ne qu'elle luy monstroït et luy disoit que bien tost elle en seroit couronnee' (a very beautiful woman holding a crown in her hand, which she showed him and said that she would soon be crowned with it).<sup>76</sup> Duncan Jones asserts that 'Marguerite's piety was very well known in England during her lifetime' (in 1545 Elizabeth translated an early work of Marguerite's called 'le Miroir de l'ame pecheresse', or, 'The Mirror of the Sinful Soul', for her stepmother Katherine Parr); even though she was Catholic she was seen as a reformer, celebrated by French Protestants in her lifetime. She is also directly connected with Anne because Anne was (mistakenly) believed to have been Marguerite's lady-in-waiting. Nicholas Sander assumes that Anne's Protestantism was attributable to Marguerite's influence.<sup>77</sup> In a sense, then, Marguerite straddles the divide between Catholic and Protestant and the displacement from Marguerite to Katherine has the extraordinary effect of emphasising Katherine's reforming instincts. The fact that a reforming duchess' dream ends up as Katherine's is yet more evidence that the play is concerned

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<sup>75</sup> E. E. Duncan Jones, 'Queen Katherine's Vision and Queen Margaret's Dream', *N&Q* (April, 1961), 142-43 (p. 142).

<sup>76</sup> *Oraison Funebre de la mort de l'incomparable Marguerite Royne de Navarre et Duchess d'Alençon*, 1550, 105, quoted in Pierre Jourda, *Marguerite d'Angouleme* (Paris, 1973), I, 337. My own translation.

<sup>77</sup> For a brief discussion of Anne's relations with Marguerite, see Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, pp. 32-33.

with conflating Henry's Protestant with his Catholic queen and thereby undermining the usual portrayal of Katherine and Anne as opposites or rivals. The vision also distils the broader concern of the play with the truth and perspective; it represents a deliberate merging of the Protestant and the Catholic queens, yet it is also possible to see the vision as entirely Catholic.

*Henry VIII* might also be seen as presenting the Catholic queen as a proxy for the Virgin Mary. Ruth Vanita examines images of the Annunciation in the play, and shows how similar they are to other pictorial representations which were popular at the time. She cites Katherine's description of her vision:

Saw you not even now a blessed troop  
 Invite me to a banquet, whose bright faces  
 Cast thousand beams upon me, like the sun?  
 They promised me eternal happiness  
 And brought me garlands. (IV.2.87-91)

Katherine later describes herself as 'like the lily | That once was mistress of the field' (III.1.151-53). The lily is a flower often associated with the Madonna, for instance, the critic Esther Singleton has described how, 'consecrated to the Virgin Mary, it was her flower as queen of heaven'.<sup>78</sup> Katherine's vision also connects her with the famous Catholic visionary Elizabeth Barton, a nun who was a particularly outspoken critic of the divorce. Barton was especially popular among Katherine's supporters in the clergy and had a history of outspoken visionary activity. In 1532 she reported that 'she had a vision of Christ re-crucified because of the King's adultery and of Anne Boleyn as a jezebel who dogs would eat'.<sup>79</sup> Chapuys further reported that Barton had a revelation in which Henry lost his crown and his kingdom, and that she had seen a 'particular place and spot destined for him in Hell'.<sup>80</sup> Katherine was actually directly investigated for her part in the Barton scandal, but she was found to

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<sup>78</sup> Esther Singleton, *The Shakespeare Garden* (New York, NY: W.F. Payson, 1931), p. 164.

<sup>79</sup> Antonia Fraser, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1994), p. 205.

<sup>80</sup> *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain*, Vol 4, ii, p. 857.

have had nothing to do with the controversy (Barton was executed for treason in 1534). The suggestion of a connection between Katherine and Barton would re-articulate a godly vision as potentially transgressive.

Holinshed reports Anne's dream on the eve of her wedding to Henry in which she sees a glorious future of Reformation of the Church and the establishment of her daughter Elizabeth as queen. Holinshed describes how 'this good queen was forwarned of hir death in a dreame,...the gouernment of queene Elizabeth should be established in tranquillitie and peace'.<sup>81</sup> George Wyatt also describes Anne Boleyn's vision of her own destruction and concludes that her marriage represents an heroic self-sacrifice which she undertook to save her country. In Thomas Heywood's play of 1605, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, the young Queen Elizabeth also had a dream of angels defending her, and she took her dream to be divinely inspired.<sup>82</sup> So the famous vision scene in *Henry VIII* acts as a key nexus between the two queens because it connects Katherine with Anne and also with her daughter Elizabeth, and it draws attention to the religious and personal connections between these two oft-opposed queens.

Katherine's vision is controversial in both literary criticism and in performance. A Spanish production at Shakespeare's Globe in 2012 presented the entire final act as a part of Katherine's vision, in other words treating Cranmer's prophecy and Elizabeth's rule as Katherine's nightmare. A review by Laura Barnett in *The Guardian* noted that the production,

performed in Castilian Spanish, felt like a reframing of the story from the Spanish side, even if the action never strayed from the English court ... the baptism of the infant Elizabeth, Henry and Anne resplendent in gold robes and crowns, while the poor, abandoned Catherine ran between them, barefoot and raving.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Chronicles*, p. 415

<sup>82</sup> *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie*, ed. by Madeleine Doran, Malone Society Reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), sc. xiv, lines 1060-68.

<sup>83</sup> Laura Barnett, 'Henry VIII – Review', *Guardian*, 31 May 2012.

The production called especial attention to the questions about truth and perspective which dominate the play. There are many examples of this fluidity of perspective suggested by *Henry VIII*: the description of the Field of Gold gradually deflates into ridicule over the course of Act I Scene 1, Buckingham is never actually proclaimed innocent of his crimes and Cranmer is freed only because of the intervention of the king which calls into question any sense of independent justice at work. This then is the final problem of *Henry VIII*, despite its '*All Is True*' subtitle: the instability of our understanding of events and the instability of our ways of accessing the past make any truly objective excavation of the past an impossibility (which connects the play back with Shakespeare's earlier histories). The final irony of the play and its portrayal of Katherine lies in her description of her daughter, Mary Tudor. Katherine's judgement is called into question just at the moment when Shakespeare has established her as a character of wisdom and sense. The audience knows what Katherine does not, that Mary's rule will be fractious and violent, she has nothing like the 'noble, modest nature' Katherine describes (IV.2.135). There is an understanding between the play and the audience about Mary Tudor which explicitly excludes Katherine and renders her judgement fallible.

In Katherine's isolation at Kimbolton, she becomes a dignified and measured counterpart to the frenzied and exuberant chaos of the London coronation; a scene which shows a mix of lords and ladies so confused that 'no man living could say "this is my wife"'. Mirroring Henry's exchange of Anne for Katherine, in the extremity of joy and abandon men lose sight of their real wives; as women become interchangeable their husbands do not much mind which is which. Katherine asks that her women be looked after; the joke being of course that Anne Boleyn had been one of them. The scene runs immediately into her death so the interchangeability of women in the coronation scene is mirrored by the switch from one queen to another. Anne becomes the new Katherine while the former queen is treated with disdain and contempt and then she dies humiliated and alone.

Katherine's claim to her rightful title and Anne's sensuousness are both problematic for Shakespeare given Elizabeth's descent from Anne Boleyn. So I've suggested that *Henry VIII* deliberately conflates these two women in order to resolve this tension. As a result, though,

distinguishing between Catholicism and Protestantism in this play becomes difficult. As McMullan points out in his Arden edition of the play, the usual suspicions about Catholic theology are muted: 'on the one hand we see Katherine as the embodiment of a stability that is in many ways more comfortable, comprehensible and credible than any new order and we see Anne as the embodiment of a divorce and schism, uncertainty and unpredictability. Where Anne is presented as a Bathsheba figure ... Katherine is depicted as a woman of strength and faith' (132). So in *Henry VIII*, the success of Anne is attributable to her motherhood of Elizabeth, not to her religious beliefs. The merging of the two women is a technique by which Shakespeare can downplay the controversy over Anne's life; her glory rests in her child. Anne is described as having all the 'royal markings of a queen' (IV.1.87); again she is directly equivalent to the queen who has been replaced. Although we've seen similarities earlier, convergence is something entirely new. Katherine and Anne are alike in being subjected to the king's will but Anne is silenced by lack of agency once she is queen so Katherine's vocal resistance to the terms of her divorce speaks for both of them. The honour and valour of Katherine, as well as the sexual interchange and the transactional nature of Henry's decision to take Anne have the effect of creating two women who are echoes of one another. In short, we have seen that resonances between the two women have become not just incidental but critical.

In Act V we see a debate between the king and Cromwell in which Henry is newly decisive and dominant, taking charge and asserting his authority over his counsellors (in contrast to his earlier scenes with Wolsey). Here Anne is absent and Katherine is dead, so it is the men of the court who deal with great affairs of state. Anne Boleyn is never actually onstage as queen, in part because Katherine's queenship dominates the play and to present Anne Boleyn physically would undermine that. Although Anne is physically absent, however, she overshadows the scene; in giving birth to the king's child and securing the rightful succession of the crown, she has secured her country's future. Since Henry is newly authoritative; the suggestion is that the pregnancy of Anne Boleyn has revived his kingship. Even so, there are obvious tensions: the Old Lady mocks Henry's claims to paternity,

which undermines that new-found manliness, and Henry's disappointment at the birth of a daughter would surely have been ridiculous, comical even, to a post-Elizabethan audience.

In the closing lines of Act V, Archbishop Cranmer describes another paradigm of queenship as it will be represented in the figure of Elizabeth. Unlike Katherine and Anne, there is nothing vulnerable or womanly about Elizabeth, neither is she described in any of the terms of the historiographical tropes I have already discussed. There is no 'mercy, chastity, meekness': this is a different kind of queen altogether. Cranmer specifically presents a figure with both male and female virtues intermingled, he says 'she shall be both feared *and* loved'. She shows strong and effective military leadership, '[h]er foes shake like a field of beaten corn, | And hang their heads with sorrow' (V.4.31-32). So in essence she is a combination of Katherine *and* Henry; she offers queenship and kingship in equal measure as she defends and nurtures the nation using her 'princely graces'. In Act V, Elizabeth rises like a phoenix, portraying the essence of 'peace, plenty, love, truth, terror' (V.4.47). The description of Elizabeth as a phoenix, timeless, offers what McMullan has seen as the solution to an endlessly repeating, cyclical time in the play; in other words, it presents a final resolution to the political turmoil of the Tudor era. Henry's words to Cranmer, '[t]hou hast made me now a man', implies that it is only in the realisation of the greatness of his daughter that he becomes a whole man (V.4.63). Being made a man secures his successful kingship because it literally secures his future. Even so, the resolution of the problems of Henry's kingship is only temporary – Shakespeare and Fletcher's audience would have known this all too clearly given the vexed questions regarding succession that dominated Elizabeth's later years, especially after the recent death of Prince Henry in November 1612.

## Conclusion

The ambiguity and complexity of *Henry VIII*, its rhythmic cycles of rise and fall, glory and failure, and the ultimate failure of the Tudor line mean that the resolution of Henry's problems in the play are

temporary. Ultimately, *Henry VIII* addresses the impossibility of a truthful excavation of the past; in its insistent and ironic use of the word 'conscience', and its re-rendering of historical figures in new altered forms, it shows the unreliability of historical versions of truth, and the instability of our understanding of the past. Establishing innocence or guilt was not my intention; rather I have sought to identify the *form* of those allegations or defences, and understand what impact it has on our understanding of women's public roles. Depictions of Anne Boleyn and Katherine of Aragon contain biases based on religion and nationalism as much as personality. In section I focused on the oppositional nature of historiography and the division and sectarianism that dominates sources. My analysis shows that the tendency to depict Katherine and Anne as a series of generalised but opposing characteristics has survived even to the present day.

In this chapter, I have continued a discussion about the literary portrayals of powerful women in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by looking in detail at various texts which describe Henry VIII's first two queens, Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Henry's actions to replace his queen(s) did not mean an end to the longstanding model of intercessory female power any more than did the initiation of regnant queenship, as we shall see in chapter 4. I have shown that discourse on queenship is marked over time by repeating stylistic and narrative patterns. For instance, the generic nature of defences of queens creates resonances between Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn that have not been fully recognised. Historical sources mute the individual agency of these women, which also has the effect of bringing them closer together. Defences of Katherine often use Griselda as a model for patience and wisdom; Katherine becomes by association an exemplar of noble queenship and suffering. Yet Anne is elsewhere similarly seen in terms of noble self-sacrifice; in Wyatt's *Life of Anne Boleigne*, for instance, she has a vision that marriage to Henry would literally bring about her death. Like Katherine, Anne is seen as a figure of bravery and self-sacrifice who is determined to fulfil her destiny no matter what it costs her personally. Furthermore, I have shown that precisely those qualities for which she is commended are those qualities that are described as necessary for the good exercise of power by a queen.



In this chapter I have traced the way in which Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* pulls together various historiographical and literary traditions and subverts them. I have shown that the play actually conflates these two women, subverting a long-established historical tradition that marks them in opposition to one another. Shakespeare and Fletcher maximise the benign function of proactive queenship emphasising unity, wisdom, and most of all, hope, which crystallises in the birth of the new heir to Henry and in Cranmer's glorious vision. Like *Henry VI*, *Henry VIII* represents an effort to re-inscribe the past to assimilate a complex literary and historic heritage; it blurs the distinctions between history and fiction, truth and prophecy. Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* offers a glamorous portrait of King Henry; showing a confident and virtuous king who chooses to sacrifice his unborn son to save the life of his queen. *Henry VIII*'s protagonist is very different, he is weak and vacillating (with characteristics that might be described as feminine) from the start.

On the contrary, I have shown that Katherine is the narrative centre of the later play; she is described as 'queen of earthly queens', whilst Anne is described as an 'angel'. The isolation of Katherine is countered by the passivity and silence of Anne in the latter part of the play who is swept along by the king's desire and by the Old Lady's assurances. Katherine resists all efforts to silence her and she asserts herself in the courtroom scene in Act IV. The vulnerability of the queen is shown literally in her physical isolation on stage and also by repeated emphasis on her language: Katherine is isolated by her Spanishness. But English is the language of truth and Katherine claims it as her rightful language, rejecting the charge of foreignness and asserting her own connection with her people. I have also analysed the astonishing portrayal of Katherine's Catholicism as truthful and honest; her Catholicism is (unlike Wolsey's) marked by plain dealing, humility and openness. The famous vision scene confirms her as godly but because of its textual history also acts as the nexus between Katherine the Catholic queen, and her two Protestant 'rivals', Anne and Elizabeth.

Ultimately, I have shown that the interchangeability of Katherine and Anne works to dramatise female defiance, female agency and political influence; it presents a portrayal of a new kind of queenship, a queenship that sets itself free from the old model of intercessory influence and

yet which is effective. In the next chapter, I will stay in the last twelve months of Shakespeare's writing life and continue my discussion of the presentation of controversial female power by looking at the new generic assertion of female autonomy at work in Shakespeare's final play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, alongside the court masques written for and starring the queen herself.

## Chapter 4

### Jacobean Queenship: Revival and Renewal in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and Anna of Denmark's masques

I began this thesis by considering suggestions in Malory's *Morte Darthur* that the militancy of powerful queens has to be tightly controlled because of a series of compromised alliances. We saw that Guenevere brings with her as dowry the Round Table that connects Arthur's men, yet she also is the site on which its destruction is writ large. I also showed that space was made for her militancy by imagining it as a defence of her person. In a similar way, as we have seen in the examination of the three parts of *Henry VI*, Margaret of Anjou's insubstantial dowry and her foreign relationships condemned her to suspicion and near-constant mistrust. Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII* deliberately draws attention to her foreignness by way of her poor English in her trial scene; I have argued that her performance distils the essence of her political isolation and vulnerability. Margaret's quest for agency in the face of a political vacuum as well as her obsession with securing succession link her with Queen Katherine but also with the resurgent Amazon imagery of the Jacobean period, as I will discuss here in my final chapter.

This chapter will demonstrate that an ongoing concern about female autonomy is manifested in the context of growing nostalgia for Elizabeth I and the emergence in the Jacobean period of the myth of female militancy on the field at Tilbury. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* both consider the issue of militant queenship and are, of course, linked by a common source in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. However, if *Dream* is a paradigmatically Elizabethan play, I will show that *Kinsmen* is a Jacobean revival and rejection of it; there is a clear shift from the chaste, silenced sovereign of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the explicitly militaristic queens of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. I will argue that *Kinsmen* represents a post-Elizabethan effort to contain and diminish the warrior or virgin queen and to retool her as an intercessory consort; most of Duke

Theseus's efforts in that play centre on preventing the Amazon Emilia from becoming the virginal warrior queen that her cultural history has marked her for.

A comparison of *Dream* with *Kinsmen* and the court masques shows the variety of audience experience in the period, and the emergence of the court masque in the Jacobean period is particularly interesting as a form in which the queen, Anna of Denmark, herself has significant input; in section III I shall identify what the new masque form tells us about her ambitions for her queenship as well as her public persona. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, theorist Judith Butler describes the body as a 'passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed'.<sup>1</sup> Her theorisations of gender provide a useful framework for exploring questions relating to the public presentation of the female body in the Jacobean court because the controversy over Anna's self-presentation in the masques is an unmistakeable consequence of her newly-inscribed 'performance' of queenship. Butler suggests that when we consider the degree of agency in the construction of identity, we must conclude that identity formation is an inherently political act because it is the result of subjective decision-making. In a Butlerian sense, therefore, we might see Anna's presentation of her half-naked, pregnant body – self-expression through display – as representing an obviously political act, one which physically pronounces her cultural influence over the court and valorises her maternal role. Her masques represent the first time the queen can use her own body directly to articulate her political persona on stage.

Several of the Jacobean court masques are very closely connected to *Dream* and *Kinsmen* by way of their focus on a particularly dystopian image of female community, their revival of Amazon communities, militancy and supernaturalism. I will read Anna of Denmark's masques as a valorisation of male power because, like *Kinsmen*, they call for the suppression of female militancy and compliant marriage as a means of confirming male political power. All these texts hint at discomfort at the idea of female community; for example, the three foreign queens at the start of

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 1.iii, p. 8.

*The Two Noble Kinsmen* explicitly challenge Theseus in public. Anna's masques also portray friction caused by the process of nationalising a foreign queen; we have seen in earlier chapters that foreign women are uniquely threatening in that they are uniquely susceptible to external, potentially uncontrollable, voices.

I shall show how the Jacobean court masques are self-consciously historical; Anna would of course have been well aware of longstanding discourses on queenship, including Shakespeare's. Because of their common interests in an heroic past, their nostalgia and their use of chivalry, they should be looked at alongside *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* with a particular focus on their *historical* perspectives on idealised queenship. Also like *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the court masques envisage a reversion from absolutism and militancy to negotiation; they point towards a revival of intercessory queenship, a queenship that is firmly rooted in the past. This re-birth of intercessory queenship in the Jacobean court forms part of the new queen's attempt to mediate publicly between Henry's medievalist militancy and James's chosen role as absolutist peacemaker. The gap which I identify between the Elizabethan and Jacobean portrayals of queens suggests that even the fact of a queen regnant did not change permanent prospects for self-expression and presentation; on the contrary, we shall see here that queenly autonomy gets reined in as the medieval model of intercessory queenship reasserts itself. I will begin with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* so as to set the ground for my argument in this chapter.

## **I Elizabethanism in *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

In this section, I intend to identify those elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which are specifically and obviously Elizabethan. The *Knight's Tale* theme embedded in *Dream* is also seen in Shakespeare's final play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (co-written with John Fletcher) – in section II I will consider how the later play revises the thematic concerns of *Dream*. I will argue that the earlier play offers a celebration of benevolent sovereignty whilst *Kinsmen* calls into question its heroic vision of a

monarch defined by temperance and reason. The Hippolyta of *Dream* is unusually gentle compared with her own literary history: any hints of female militancy are contained and male sovereign power is unquestioned; revisiting the terms of the idealisation of female power in the later play, Shakespeare completely re-writes the role of the Amazon queen.

Critical work over the years has tended to veer between the assumption that *Dream* was written as part of the festivities for an aristocratic wedding, and the protestation that viewing the play solely in terms of its original performance history is reductive and unhelpful. In the 1950s, critical consensus was clearly in the wedding masque camp; Paul N. Siegel, for example, suggests that the wedding masque occasion for the play would have enhanced the audience's appreciation and understanding of it and therefore that we must always bear it in mind when watching the play. He argues that, 'by reading the play with the occasion constantly in our minds, by becoming the wedding guest in our imagination, we can recapture something of the total aesthetic experience of its first-performance audience experience which adds to the experience of the audiences of all ages a teasing piquancy of its own'.<sup>2</sup> In other words, he thinks that the occasion of its staging should dominate our understanding of it just as it would have dominated that of the audience at its original performance.

There are serious problems with this reading. Firstly, the assumption that it was performed at a wedding ought not limit our understanding of it as a publicly performed piece; for it to have been a successful play, it must have made as much sense to the commoner watching in the Globe Theatre as it did to the private audience Siegel and others claim for it. Secondly, this reading focuses more on the audience of its performance than on the text itself which is surely missing the point. Finally, it ignores important textual clues about the ambiguous nature of marriage and marital conflict in the play. Unlike Siegel, I think the condition of its original performance can (and should) be separated from the thematic concerns which the play expresses; there is no reason why those

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<sup>2</sup> Paul N. Siegel, 'A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Wedding Guests', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April, 1953), 139-44 (p. 139).

two things need overlap entirely. To focus on the play as a celebration of a wedding ceremony and ritual is to miss much of the complexity of the play, as well as the ambiguity in some of Theseus's relations with his bride-to-be, the conquered Hippolyta, not to mention the obvious conflict between Oberon and Titania.

Nevertheless, critics continue to go backwards and forwards in their claims about the performance history of *Dream*. For example, Brooks in his Arden 2 Introduction of the play proclaims (on the basis of little evidence) that '[i]t seems likely that Elizabeth was present when the *Dream* was first acted' whilst, on the other hand, Maurice Hunt's allegorical reading of the play as a 'clever, allusive ridicule of the queen' leads him to deny that she was ever present at its earliest performance.<sup>3</sup> Harold Brooks goes on to assert that:

[M]ost scholars are agreed that the *Dream* was designed to grace a wedding in a noble household. [T]he *Dream* has many marks of a wedding play. The owner of 'this palace', blest by the fairies with the promise that he 'Ever shall in safety rest' is likely to have been identifiable, not with Theseus alone, but also with the owner of a mansion where in actual fact there was on the occasion a 'best bride-bed'.<sup>4</sup>

His argument seems to depend, rather than proof, on an *absence* of proof; he reads the lack of information about its first public performance as proof that there was *not*, in fact, a public performance. We see this in his convoluted syntactical pronouncement that 'other of Shakespeare's romantic comedies do end with marriage; but that does *not* mean the *Dream* is *no* more apt than others to have been part of a wedding entertainment' (p. liv). Brooks goes on to offer an eccentric hypothesis, based on the bride's father being a keen musician and the fact that the bride was one of Elizabeth's (many) goddaughters, that the play formed the basis for a wedding entertainment. He concludes, 'the hypothesis which fits the largest number of acts and probabilities – though it must

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice Hunt, 'A Speculative Political Allegory in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', p. 449.

<sup>4</sup> Harold F. Brooks, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Harold F. Brooks, 'The Arden Shakespeare, Series 2' (London: Routledge, 1988), xxi – lxxxviii (p. liii). All subsequent references are to this edition.

remain a hypothesis – is that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was composed in the Winter of 1595-6 for the Carey wedding on 19<sup>th</sup> February' (p. lviii). G.K. Hunter has also argued of *Dream* that its 'occasion ... is aristocratic rather than popular', citing as evidence its particular shortness (in both the Q and the F versions), which would lend itself towards private entertainment, and that its needs for resources (such as need for so many boy actors, and hugely varied musical resources) beyond those normally available in public theatre imply that it was performed in private.<sup>5</sup>

Yet stage directions which point at exits and entrances on two sides of the stage seem to me to support an argument that it was originally written for the public stage; a performance in a private home would be unlikely to have had this easy stage access. And as Stanley Wells says, 'if Shakespeare's company could at any time muster enough boys for public performance it could have done so at the start'.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the complexity of its staging requirements is a constant problem; if it could be done in the early seventeenth century there's no reason why it could not have been done a few years earlier at the earliest performances. In general, I think the evidence for its composition for a private wedding is not persuasive. David Marshall further points out that Theseus's vocabulary on the occasion of his forthcoming marriage also disproves critics' insistence on the play as a valorisation of marriage. Theseus declares that he will wed Hippolyta '[w]ith pomp, with triumph, and with revelling', and Marshall suggests that 'pomp, revelling, and particularly triumph sound as much like a military celebration as a wedding' (I.1.19).<sup>7</sup> I think the most compelling proof that *Dream* was not created as a wedding masque is that it does not actually promote marriage.

Notwithstanding the questions that linger over its original audience, one of the play's key thematic concerns is with the *public* performance of sovereignty. *Dream* makes repeated assertions

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<sup>5</sup> G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Stanley Wells (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> David Marshall, 'Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *ELH*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Autumn, 1982), 543-75 (p. 549).



about the virtuous exercise of sovereignty and the public exercise of justice, clear, for example, in Theseus's claim that humility and good sense are vital to his ability to connect with his subjects. He says:

I read as much as from the rattling tongue  
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.  
Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity  
In least speak most, to my capacity. (V.1.102-5)

Theseus is claiming here that the simple loyalty of a subject is as valuable as glorious victories and heroic achievements; he recognises his subjects' love even if the expression of it fails. His words echo the behaviour of Elizabeth on progress; she is reported as telling a nervous subject in Warwick in 1572 'come hither, little Recorder, it was told me that you would be afraid to look upon me or to speak boldly; but you were not so afraid of me as I was of you'.<sup>8</sup> We might read Theseus's role in the play as a tribute to Elizabeth's behaviour; he dispenses justice publicly and fairly, and he upholds a law of Athens 'which by no means we may extenuate', even if it goes against his own will (I.1.120). In short, I think we might read in Theseus's concern and affection for his people a compliment to the ruling queen whether she was literally seated amongst the first audience or not.

Yet the portrayal of Theseus will change materially in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* where we witness an increasingly arbitrary exercise of power. Neither is the Hippolyta of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the Hippolyta of *Kinsmen* or of its *Knight's Tale* source. Chaucer's queen was clearly vanquished; Chaucer describes how '[t]he queene anon, for verray wommanhede, | Gan for to wepe'.<sup>9</sup> In *Dream*, by contrast, she is described as a 'bouncing Amazon' and as his 'warrior love' (I.1.14) – far from Chaucer's 'asseged' original (879). Nevertheless, there are hints even in *Dream* of disquiet. The reference to Hippolyta as Theseus's 'pale companion' hints at melancholia even though he is instructing her to 'turn melancholy forth' (I.1.14). Titania's reminder about Theseus's betrayal

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<sup>8</sup> *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, quoted by Brooks in *Dream*, p. lxvii.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Knight's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, lines 1748-49.

of Ariadne calls into question the issue of the mutuality of their love. That question is exacerbated by Hippolyta's oft-noted silence; when Theseus tells Hippolyta, 'I woo'd thee with my sword, | And won thy love doing thee injuries', she makes no response, and the question of how to read her silence is a potential source of conflict in this play (I.1.16-17). Theseus is not conflicted; he later declares, 'out of this silence yet I picked a welcome', but it is not clear from the text alone that we can really read love in her silence or resistance (the decision is usually taken in performance) (V.1.100). Any explicit threat to sovereign power in *Dream* is displaced from Hippolyta onto Titania, whose loyalty to feminine bonds suggests the prioritisation of female community and friendship over marriage; she is the forerunner to Emilia in the later play. Although her husband Oberon wants to adopt her changeling child, Titania refuses to release him because, she says,

His mother was a votress of my order;

Full often hath she gossip'd by my side;

[...]

And for her sake do I rear up her boy;

And for her sake I will not part with him. (II.1.123-25; 136-37)

Titania's challenge to authority and Oberon's need to punish her for it hints at concerns about female power and resistance which will become explicit in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

In *Dream* Hippolyta is a constant reminder of the moon goddess, Diana, who is the goddess of both wisdom and chastity and also a virgin huntress. Hippolyta's comparison of the new crescent moon to Diana's silver bow makes this clear, as does her reference to her own pre-history; she says, 'I was with Hercules and Cadmus once, | When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear | With hounds of Sparta', which also hints at Actaeon's violent death at the hands of Diana's hunting hounds (IV.1.111-3). Recurrent Diana iconography in this play functions as a means of expressing femininity rooted in the chastity that is specifically associated with Elizabeth because of a common cultural association between Diana and Elizabeth in the period. Frances Yates's *Astraea* and Roy Strong's *The Cult of Elizabeth* trace the emergence of this classical iconography for Elizabeth,

attributing what they see as the secularisation of mariological imagery inherent in new versions of Elizabeth as Diana or Cynthia to the political and social upheavals of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>10</sup> John N. King has examined the diachronic progress of this Diana iconography, arguing that the cult of 'Gloriana' changed over time, 'defined by the practicalities of Elizabethan *and* Jacobean politics'.<sup>11</sup> King demonstrates that in the earlier years of her reign, she was commonly described as Athena rather than Cynthia, an association which focuses attention more on her wisdom and virtue than on her virginity, because there was still hope that she would provide an heir. For this reason, it is Athena who appears as Elizabeth in what Roy Strong identifies as 'the earliest of the allegorical paintings of Elizabeth', *Queen Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses*, a version of the Judgement of Paris painted in 1569 by Hans Eworth.<sup>12</sup> Marie Axton describes how as the queen 'grew older and hope for offspring faded, Diana or Cynthia as a public image found reluctant acceptance'.<sup>13</sup> It was not until around the 1580s after the failure of her last serious marriage negotiation that the cult of Elizabeth as Diana, the cult of the Virgin Queen, took hold; for example, in Spenser's description of Eliza as 'the flowre of Virgins' and as 'a mayden Queene' in his April eclogue of *The Shepherde's Calender*, published late in 1579.<sup>14</sup> Nashe's *Piers Penniless* written in 1592 also refers to 'the court I dare not touch, but surely there (as in the heavens) be many falling starres, and but one true Diana'.<sup>15</sup>

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* reflects this iconographical switch. Oberon's famous description of an 'imperial votress' in Act II Scene 1 of *Dream* is usually taken as a direct reference to

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<sup>10</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Astraea, The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 34-36; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> John N. King, 'Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring, 1990), 30-74 (p. 36).

<sup>12</sup> Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Elizabeth I* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 65; the painting is owned by the Royal Collection Trust, UK.

<sup>13</sup> Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Spenser, 'The Shepherdes Calendar, April' in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by Oram, Bjorvand, Bond, Cain, Dunlop and Schell (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 67-85, p. 72, line 48; 57.

<sup>15</sup> Nashe, *Piers Penniless*, p. 64.

Queen Elizabeth; he describes 'Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took | At a fair vestal, throned by the west' (II.1.157-58). Oberon describes how 'the imperial votress passed on' and the bolt of Cupid lands, instead, 'upon a little western flower, | Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound' (II.1.163; 167). The passage shows Elizabeth as Diana; fair, chaste, meditative, wise and humble, entirely untroubled by the desire of those who watch her as she passes by. Its allegorical meanings have been taken even further, however. Noting that she *is* penetrated by Cupid's fiery shaft after all (even though she manages to extinguish its flame), and subverting the common assumption that the play compliments the queen, Maurice Hunt goes further than most in his desire to find contemporary parallels for the play, extravagantly suggesting the changeling Indian boy is a portrayal of the outsider James and arguing that 'in Shakespeare's dark conceit, Henry VIII as Oberon claims James VI as his surrogate son and heir'.<sup>16</sup> Hunt argues, in other words, that *Dream* is a play about a barren Elizabeth and the selection of her successor.

Whilst it is not overly far-fetched to suggest that Hippolyta and even Theseus might be symbolic representations of Elizabeth, at the same time we must avoid the temptation to go too far in understanding the play as a literal representation of contemporary political references. The danger in reading an early modern text as if it were a *roman à clef* is that it forces meanings upon a text that might be incapable of supporting them; identifying a suggestion of Elizabethan ideals in *Dream* is more useful than Hunt's absolutist assertion that Oberon represents Henry VIII's fears about succession. This absolutist insistence ignored obvious problems in the debate about *Dream* as a wedding masque performed for Elizabeth, and it is clear too in Hunt's exaggerated reading of the play. What this play offers, instead, is entry into a discourse about varying forms of marriage and queenship.

The difference from the Hippolyta of *Dream* to the Hippolyta of *Kinsmen* is partly explained by the fact that the mythology of a benign yet martial queen became much more emphatic in the light of James's negotiations with the Spanish Emperor and his unpopular pacificism. A survey of the

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<sup>16</sup> Hunt, 'A Speculative Political Allegory in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', p. 441.

diachronous development of Elizabeth's image as a martial queen shows that images of the martial queen that date from Elizabeth's reign related specifically and deliberately to the Armada invasion; they celebrated Protestant fortitude and courage in the face of attempted invasion by Catholic forces. The famous text of Elizabeth's Tilbury speech ('I know I have the bodie, but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and Stomach of a King, and of a King of England, too') does not appear until 1623 in a letter from Dr Lionel Sharp.<sup>17</sup> In 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury', Susan Frye argues, however, that a version had already been published in 1612, itself based on a 1601 sermon by William Leigh.<sup>18</sup> Both Leigh and Sharp rely quite clearly upon verses by James Aske and Thomas Deloney, both of which were written in the wake of the Armada victory. Whichever source we accept as offering the foundational moment of the Tilbury myth, the point is that the moment they describe is artificially created from a conflation of dramatic and poetic sources.

In an influential article published in 1940, Celeste T. Wright argued that Elizabeth's subjects tended to refrain from explicit and controversial comparisons between their queen and the Amazons.<sup>19</sup> This is a largely inaccurate claim; references to Elizabeth's militancy are often couched in Amazonian terms. In her article, 'Queen Elizabeth as the Amazon', Winfried Schleiner gathers together all the contemporaneous sources addressing Elizabeth's performance at Tilbury.<sup>20</sup> In his blank verse epic *Elizabetha Triumphans*, published in 1588 – and potential source for Lionel Sharp's letter – James Aske describes Elizabeth's martial performance at Tilbury. He describes her

Most brauely mounted on a stately Steede  
With Trunchion in her hand (not us'd thereto)  
...  
In nought unlike the Amazonian Queene,

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<sup>17</sup> 'Dr Lionel Sharp to the Duke of Buckingham', cited in *Cabala, Mysteries of State* (London: Bodell and Collins, 1654), p. 260.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Frye, 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 23. 1 (Spring, 1992), 95-114 (p. 101).

<sup>19</sup> Celeste T. Wright, 'The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature', *SP*, XXXVII (1940), 433-456 (p. 433).

<sup>20</sup> Winfried Schleiner, "'Divina Virago': Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon", *Studies in Philology*, Vol 75, No. 2 (Spring, 1978), 163-80.

Who beating downe amaine the bloodie Greekes,  
 Thereby to grapple with Achillis stout,  
 Euer at the time when Troy was sore besieg'd.<sup>21</sup>

According to Aske, Elizabeth's donning of male battle gear was inspired by the valour of her soldiers; and he explicitly likens her to the Amazon queen Penthesilea who battles through the Greek ranks in order to fight Achilles. As Penthesilea, though, the queen becomes a figure not only of heroic martial prowess, but also violent opposition to male power. Schleiner also cites a contemporary ballad by Thomas Deloney, 'The queenes visiting of the Campe at Tilburie, with her entertainment there', which reports Elizabeth 'tossing up her plume of feathers'; a plumed helmet is characteristic of the Amazons.<sup>22</sup> An anonymous contemporary ballad mentions a 'martial staffe' and in his *Annales*, published in 1615, William Camden elaborates this even further, describing the queen with a 'leader's truncheon' in her hand, moving 'sometimes with a martial pace and sometimes riding like a woman', specifically opposing womanhood with militancy.<sup>23</sup> A collection of Latin poems called *Triumphalia de victoriis Elizabethae* published a year after the Armada under the pseudonym Eleutherius, describes Elizabeth on the battlefield; 'De gente forti qualis Amazonum | Armata concurrit Maeotis | Penthesileia viris virago', which Schleiner translates as 'the armed Scythian queen, Penthesilea, of the brave race of the Amazons, joins battle, a virago against men'.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Schleiner cites another (anonymous) poem of 1600 which addresses her as a queen 'that rangest battayles in fields | And bearest harnesse, speare, and shielde'.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to Wright's claim, Schleiner's work has shown that explicitly Amazonian iconography was present in several

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<sup>21</sup> James Aske, 'Elizabetha Triumphans', p. 570.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Deloney, *His Thomas of Reading and Three Ballads on the Spanish Armada*, ed. by C. R. Aldrich and L. S. Kirtland (New York, 1903), p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> *A Joyfull Song of the royall receiung of the Queenes most excellent Maiestie unto her...Campe at Tilburie* (London, 1588); William Camden, *Annales rerum Anglicarum...regnante Elizabetha*, trans. by T. Browne, Vol I (London, 1625-1629), p. 493.

<sup>24</sup> Eleutherius, *Triumphalia de victoriis Elizabethae...contra classem illustrissimam Philippi Hispaniarum regis* (London, 1589), p. 30; trans. by Winfried Schleiner in 'Divina Virago: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon', p. 171.

<sup>25</sup> *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London: John Nichols and Son, 1823), Vol III, p. 485, cited in Schleiner, 'Divina Virago', p. 174.

contemporary sources; Elizabeth was, in fact, compared to an Amazon even in her own lifetime (although how widespread was the readership of Aske and others is still a matter for conjecture). The portrayal of Britomart in Spenser's *Faerie Queen* certainly suggests that the iconography of the Amazon was not too controversial to use openly as an allegory for an idealised queen. The important conclusion to draw, I think, is that the historical accuracy of her speech at Tilbury is less important than the myth that sprung up about it, a myth that was already starting to develop in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign.

The Tilbury myth developed even more fully in the Jacobean period. Susan Frye traces the process by which depictions of Elizabeth change from 'stately victor' to 'active, armoured queen' over the course of the Jacobean period, arguing that 'the myth of the queen at Tilbury played an important part in creating a powerfully militaristic mythology for Elizabeth in an age of an unpopularly pacifist king'.<sup>26</sup> Frye demonstrates, for example, how an increasing focus on Amazonianism is embedded in the publication history of Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie* (Part 2). Originally published in 1606, the play describes simply how '[a] mayden Queene will be your Generall'.<sup>27</sup> However, the same play exists in a second version which dates from 1633 and contains a very different picture of Elizabeth; the later version goes into much more detail about the military resolve of the queen and the cruelty of the Spanish (with whom James had unpopularly and unsuccessfully tried to form an alliance). In the second text, Elizabeth calls her subjects to arms, saying:

Know my subjects  
Your Queene hath now put on a Masculine spirit,  
To tell the bold and daring what they are  
Or what they ought to be

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<sup>26</sup> Frye, 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury', p. 112.

<sup>27</sup> Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie*, Part 2, ed. by Madeleine Doran, Malone Society Reprint (Oxford University Press, 1934); 1607 ed. I: 2639.

Nor let the best proov'd souldier heere disdain

A woeman should conduct an hoast of men.<sup>28</sup>

So the earlier version has her simply acting as 'general', whilst the second actually shows her actively participating in a field of war. In the second her chastity becomes proof of her valour and her worthiness to lead and to command a host of soldiers. It is clear, then, that this second version expands greatly on her militancy. In *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine the Most Worthy Women of the World* written in 1640, Heywood revisits this theme of martial women:

[l]et me not forget the Campe at Tilbery in which her Majestie was in person, and that if the Spaniard had prevailed by Sea to have given him battaile by land, appearing in the head of her Troopes, and encouraging her Souldiers, habited like an Amazonian Queene, Buskind and plumed, having a golden Truncheon, Gantlet and Gorget.<sup>29</sup>

This is an extraordinary vision of Elizabeth in the likeness of the Amazon; she is ultra-feminine in her attire but she is also adopting a masculine heroic pose. The description suggests the iconography of Diana; the virtuous queen *and* martial hero. The growing valorisation of female militancy and the increasing identification of the Amazon Queen with the protection of the English nation, I suggest, is crystallised in the gap between the modest Hippolyta of the Elizabethan *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the subversive resistance of the Amazon women of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. John N. King has suggested that 'Jacobean politics provided a motive for the anachronistic revival of the cult of Elizabeth as a model ruler whose perpetual virginity symbolised political integrity, Protestant ideology, and a militantly interventionist policy against Spain'.<sup>30</sup> In other words, praise for the late queen becomes synonymous with criticism of James.

I argued earlier that the *Henry VI* plays deliberately medievalise their theme of female militancy so as to avoid any insulting or dangerous analogies between Margaret the she-wolf and

<sup>28</sup> Doran includes parallel texts of the Armada scenes from the 1606 and 1633 editions on pp. xl-li.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine of the Most Worthy Women of the World: Three Jewes. Three Gentiles. Three Christians. Written by the author of the History of Women* (London: T. Cotes for R. Royston, 1640), p. 211.

<sup>30</sup> John N. King, 'Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen', p. 68.



Elizabeth. Similarly, the Hippolyta of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is unusually benign compared with her own pre-history. In *Dream* Hippolyta is companionable and dignified; there are no signs of an unruly Amazon warrior to threaten the benevolent authority of the sovereign. Her chastity is frequently emphasised, and her heroic past is obliquely referenced via Theseus's jealousy and also her brief words about her own history, 'I was with Hercules and Cadmus once' (IV.1.111). Her words offer a reminder that she is from a different place and time, but they are also an acknowledgement that her community of heroes and women is lost and irrecoverable. In the next section, I will consider how *The Two Noble Kinsmen* revises the *Knight's Tale* theme; I will examine in close detail how Jacobean rule inspires a re-writing of the figure of the Amazon by Shakespeare, and I will investigate precisely how he revisits the terms of the idealisation of female power in his final play.

## II Militant women and chivalric display in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

In this section I will consider how Shakespeare, in collaboration again with Fletcher, revises his earlier *Knight's Tale* play for the new Jacobean era. Lois Potter in her Arden edition of the play dates the play to the winter of 1613-14, which is within 12 months of the death of Prince Henry.<sup>31</sup> Roy Strong sees the melancholy and sense of pointless display in the play as referencing the death of the Prince just before the play's composition. He argues that Prince Henry is the direct inspiration for *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and claims that its subject matter and imagery point to the young prince's interest in horses, armour and sailing.<sup>32</sup> The play's chivalric theme is an obvious echo of Arthurian myth with which Henry frequently associated himself, yet the disillusionment brought on by Henry's death is clear in *Kinsmen's* portrayal of degraded chivalry. Glynne Wickham also reads the play firmly within its Jacobean political context; he controversially argues that the play is an allegorised vision of Princess Elizabeth torn between her dead brother Henry Frederick (Arcite) and her fiancé Frederick

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<sup>31</sup> Lois Potter, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, pp. 1-129 (p. 35).

<sup>32</sup> Roy Strong, *Henry, Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

Henry (Palamon).<sup>33</sup> Wickham's view has generally been discredited as too literal; there's no evidence that Palamon represents a direct portrait of Frederick of Palatine nor is there any evidence that Elizabeth herself was resistant to the idea of marriage to Frederick.

As Lois Potter observes in her Arden introduction, *Kinsmen* is a 'Jacobean dramatisation of a medieval tale based on an Italian romance version of a Latin epic about one of the oldest and most tragic Greek legends'.<sup>34</sup> The fragmented nature of *Kinsmen* is often explained by citing its collaborative authorship, but its conflicted thematic and structural concerns might equally be seen as deliberate. If we accept Potter's view that only Acts I and V are by Shakespeare, it becomes clear that Shakespeare is responsible for those moments of public chivalric performance rather than the world of romance comedy of the middle parts of the play.<sup>35</sup> The very process of revision both reminds us of the original chivalric source and calls our attention to deviations from it; by imagining Chaucer turning in his grave, the Prologue instantly incorporates that process of both revision and rejection in the opening lines.

*The Two Noble Kinsmen* shows Shakespeare revising himself, of course, in reverting to the *Knight's Tale* source of his earlier work but it also represents a parody of Beaumont's *Masque of Inner Temple and Gray's Inn*, a masque written to be performed at the wedding celebration for Princess Elizabeth to Frederick the Elector Palatine (postponed because of Henry's death). Like a masque, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* emphasises visual aspects such as the widows' intercession in Act I, the dance, the preparations for battle in Act II, and what Potter has called the 'deliberately barbaric ritual' of the temple scene at the end.<sup>36</sup> As in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, these masque-like interludes call attention to a central sovereign power around whom and for whose benefit those public rituals are performed. However, in this case the play addresses James not Elizabeth and the

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<sup>33</sup> Glynne Wickham, 'The Two Noble Kinsmen or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* II?', *The Elizabethan Theatre VII*, ed. by G. R. Hibbard (Ontario: P.D. Meany, 1980), 167-96.

<sup>34</sup> Lois Potter, 'Introduction', in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> For full attribution analysis, see Lois Potter, 'Introduction', in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, pp. 24-34.

<sup>36</sup> Lois Potter, 'Introduction', in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, p. 95.

themes and ideals of this play reflect that shift; I will show how *Kinsmen* parodies precisely those Elizabethan ideals of virginity and chastity which we saw articulated in *Dream*.

Changes to its source material and the medievalism which we detect throughout *Kinsmen* both point to a new concern with militarism and unruly female power. Here, idealised queenship becomes, once again, intercessory (although there is evidence of challenge and subversion inherent even in petitionary queenship). Unlike *Dream*, this play addresses the problem of female militancy directly, and the invocation of chivalric archetypes suggests a much more problematic female heroism than in the earlier play. The description of Hippolyta's 'tresses' draws attention to her virginity, femininity and vulnerability, in sharp contrast with references to her martial history:

Most dreaded Amazonian, that hast slain  
 The scythe-tusked boar; that with thy arm, as strong  
 As it is white, wast near to make the male  
 To thy sex captive. (I.1.78-81)

So we see that she is dreadful and physically strong, even while she is physically marked as female by her flowing hair and her bare white arms (suggestive of the outraged reception to Anna's bare arms in her performance of *The Masque of Blackness* which I shall examine later); the woman who mercilessly slays her enemies is at the same time pure *and* seductive. She is addressed as a 'soldieress, | That equally canst poise sternness with pity' (I.1.85-86). Unlike Hippolyta's cursory reference in *Dream* ('I was with Hercules'), in this play her pre-history is clearly signposted. She is from the start both warrior and huntress, an autonomous presence with a detailed martial history.

In the portrayal of Hippolyta in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, there are other important distinctions from her Elizabethan forebear. In *Kinsmen* she operates not as an individual warrior, but as a member of a community of knights, an army of women; very different from the isolated Hippolyta of *Dream*. In *Kinsmen*, for instance, she speaks of her comrades-in-arms:

We have been soldiers and we cannot weep  
 When our friends don their helms, or put to sea

Or tell of babes broached on the lance, or women

That have sod their infants in (and after eat them)

The brine they wept at killing 'em. (I.3.18-22)

The rejection of their weaker natures, their failure to weep at news of the murder of babies, suggests that the fact of an exclusively female community differentiates these women from the ones who operate normally within patriarchal communities.

Several contemporaneous plays also address this issue of militant female communities and leadership; Fletcher's *Bonduca*, first performed in 1610, is a good example. Since Fletcher was writing *Bonduca* not long before he collaborated with Shakespeare on *Kinsmen*, we might reasonably detect some echoes from the former play. *Bonduca* shows the impenetrable, self-contained aspect of female communities and demonstrates that they offer very real dangers to normal functioning society. In the quotation below, we first meet the queen immediately after she has beaten the Romans in combat; Bonduca triumphantly declares she has

scatter'd 'em,

And through their big-bon'd Germans, on whose Pikes

The honour of their actions sit in triumphs,

Made Themes for songs to shame 'em, and a woman,

A woman beat 'em, Nennius; a weak woman,

A woman beat these Romanes.<sup>37</sup>

We can see clear similarities between the two passages above, with their references to bodies spiked with lances or pikes, to the resistance of the female to a submissive, conquered role, and more generally with the contrasting of male expectations of weakness with the reality of glorious female martial triumph. Both plays were performed by the King's Men, a year or so apart, suggesting that the actor playing the Daughter here would be playing Emilia soon after. Another similarity lies in

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<sup>37</sup> John Fletcher, 'Bonduca', in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 149-261; I.1.12-17. All subsequent references are to this edition.

these passages' focus on the *tales* of martial activity as marking the source of power; stories about such feats of arms provide a subversive threat just as much as the feats themselves. Those songs and stories serve to shame and humiliate male forces publicly and they mark the moment at which female heroism becomes iconographical, part of a new narrative of national history that ensures the permanent diminution of male military authority and success.

In *Bonduca* the stated aim of Bonduca's women is to avenge the wrongs perpetrated upon other women. Bonduca's First Daughter prays to God that she might avenge the '[i]nsulting wrongs, and ravishments of women [...] their shames, the sufferings | Of those that daily fill'd thy Sacrifice | With virgin incense', and her Second Daughter later insists, 'we will have vengeance for our rapes' (III.1.28-31; III.5.69). In this militarised and physically discrete community of women, military success becomes tied to a broader idea of restorative justice for women. The suicide of Bonduca and her daughters in *Bonduca* is the ultimate gesture of both self-sufficiency and defiance; they enact their resistance in a performance of a brave and public death. Their deaths represent the final act of self-expression and self-defence, seen clearly in the Daughter's dying words below about finding in heaven an enduring chastity; for her, heaven is a place '[w]here eternal | Our youths are, and our beauties, where no Wars come, | Nor lustful slaves to ravish us' (IV.4.110-12). I think this offers an interesting parallel with Emilia's efforts to defend her own virginity in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; the valorisation of chastity in both plays offers a portrait of opposition and resistance by female communities which can only be contained by marriage or death. When Bonduca's daughter asserts self-sufficiency and resistance even in death, her words are clearly punctuated by reminders of the enclosed, isolated nature of her female community; 'we', 'our', 'us'. In other words, this is not personal defiance, but group rejection. Bonduca describes herself at the end as 'swell'd with glory' because she has dictated the terms of her own performance despite military defeat and humiliation, an echo of her earlier triumphalism; 'a woman beat these Romanes'.

Caratach's final eulogy offers an idealised dream fantasy which might equally apply to Emilia's dilemma in *Kinsmen*; he describes a fantasy of the quenching of a woman's 'fiery spirit'

through the death that she has chosen, rather than the marriage upon which Theseus insists.

Although Bonduca is certainly an ambivalent character in the play that bears her name, her defiance and her stated desire to wreak vengeance on behalf of wronged, oppressed women make the play an interesting counterpart to *Kinsmen* with its focus on feminine friendship and community. In the latter, it is not death that offers the gravest threat; Hippolyta and Emilia face 'extinction' by marriage. Hippolyta is a vanquished and subdued warrior queen, contained and restrained by her husband's authority; the second queen reproaches her by telling her that she is 'to thy sex captive'; she adds, Theseus has 'shrunk thee into | The bound thou wast o'erflowing, at once subduing | Thy force and thy affection' (I.1.83-85). As we saw in section I, this was only ever hinted at in the 'pale melancholy' of the Hippolyta of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

From the very earliest scenes of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* female community is a major concern, as it is in several of Fletcher's plays dating from this period.<sup>38</sup> At the start, women are divided into ritualised roles: mourner, wife, widow, petitioner. They are all subservient to Theseus. The widows in Act 1 perform a masque, a song which recreates the deaths of their husbands, as they ask for protection and assistance from Theseus. The stage directions give a sense of the masque-like nature of this scene, the physical performance of grief and submission:

*Enter three Queens in black, with veils stained, with Imperial crowns. The First Queen falls down at the foot of Theseus; the Second falls down at the foot of Hippolyta; the Third before Emilia.* (I.1)

Although the queens ask for the pity of their gentle lord, they are really appealing to the self-interest of their interlocutors. They address Theseus for 'pity's sake and true gentility', Hippolyta '[f]or your mother's sake | And as you wish your womb may thrive with fair ones', and Emilia 'for the love of him whom Jove hath marked | The honour of your bed and for the sake | Of clear virginity' (they operate on the false assumption that Emilia is looking for a husband) (I.1.25; 26-27; 29-31). Even

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<sup>38</sup> In addition to *Bonduca*, see also Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed*, ed. by Lucy Munro (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).

more crucially, they are clearly relying on an alliance between women to get what they want; their intercession is aimed at Hippolyta and Emilia who take over and petition Theseus directly and successfully. The widowed queens offer formal 'worshyppe' and public fealty to their lord in a return to an older intercessory form of feminine power. They reject outright Theseus's initial decision; this is a vision of determined, aggressively intercessory queenship totally absent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Theseus is described as Mars, a great warrior king and 'purger of the earth' (I.1.48). And yet the widows only persuade him to intervene by appealing to his vanity; they tell him to 'remember that your fame | Knolls in the ear o'th' world' (I.1.133-34). This is a character, lest we forget, famed through history for desertion and failure to stand up for women (Ariadne, Medea, Phaedra; it's a long list).

Hippolyta agrees to serve the widows to avoid 'ladies scandal'; in other words she recognises and publicly acknowledges her obligation to serve women. Her influence over Theseus is, here, the source of her power; when the widows urge her to intercede with Theseus on their behalf, they urge her to '[s]peak't in a woman's key' (I.1.94). The function of intercession is problematic because it is both empowering and humiliating for the women who need to use it. Hippolyta sees her own intercessory role as a defeat; as she tells Theseus, 'I went beyond all women, | Almost all men, and yet I yielded, Theseus' (III.6.206-7). Yet she also recognises its power: in a later scene she urges Emilia to intercede for mercy on behalf of the two knights, telling her sister to '[s]peak not to be denied' (III.6.186). So the figure of the Amazon in this play offers the threatening prospect of female conquest *both* by battle *and* by speech.

So we see embedded resistance in the newly revived form of intercessory power on display in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. This is also clear in Emilia's response to Hippolyta's request to intercede. Emilia capitulates, saying 'I will be woman and have pity' (III.6.191); like the kneeling widows of Act I, she kneels before Theseus. Yet I think we must read defiance or at least resistance here; although she agrees to intercede, at the same time she is clearly not convinced that she has any responsibility for the plight of her two suitors, Palamon and Arcite. Theseus blames her for their desperate rivalry

and asks her to choose between them, but she refuses to accept responsibility, responding that she never knew of their love for her; they saw her from afar, and so, she claims, '[t]he misadventure of their own eyes kill' em' (III.6.190). She kneels to Theseus, even whilst there is clearly resistance to her prescribed role; she kneels without acknowledging that she has any intercessory power, nor any role to play in their release. Rather as the widows had used their intercessory role to reject Theseus's initial ruling, Emilia is *forced* to kneel to beg Theseus for their lives, which has the effect of converting an attitude of petition into a form of resistance. It is clear that Theseus recognises that resistance because he punishes her even more; it is at precisely this point that he commutes his ruling into death for the loser's team (III.6.296-7).

Emilia explicitly obstructs Theseus's will firstly by refusing to choose a husband, then in her refusal to intercede on her suitors' behalf, and finally in her refusal to present herself publicly as the object over which they are fighting. She memorably describes herself as 'bride-habited | But maiden-hearted' (V.1.150-51). The chastity that was valorised in *Dream* has become a sign of resistance in this play, a refusal to enact the sovereign's will for her to marry. Emilia highlights a concern about the anonymising effect of marriage; in her rejection of the transactional value of her chastity, virginity becomes disruptive and subversive (his anger is a direct reminder that her value to him is her marriageability). She asks Diana's 'female knights' to protect her from marriage; the figure of Diana is, as we know, associated with female community, a community that is threatening to men. Emilia's chastity becomes re-inscribed as opposition, which is even more threatening to patriarchy than an individual act of resistance because it *publicly* challenges Theseus's ability to extract 'exchange value' from her.

Lois Potter has noted that the RSC production of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* at the Swan Theatre in 1986 reflected the view that 'the play's deepest conflict is not between the kinsmen, but between Theseus, as patriarchal ruler of Athens, and Emilia, as representative of 'the powers of all



women'.<sup>39</sup> As I have said, Emilia is ultimately silenced not by death but by marriage. She is made to watch the contest between the two knights against her will, to participate in the process of her own extinction. She concludes, 'I am extinct'; she has no will, nor any prospect of revival and the only autonomy she has is that she is able to articulate her own defeat. Gordon McMullan has described this final capitulation as profoundly shocking, arguing that her belief in her own agency is 'shattered by the eternal forces embodied in the oracle in Act V'.<sup>40</sup> Laurie Shannon describes Emilia as Theseus's 'victim' in this scene; Theseus himself describes her as 'the victor's meed, the prize and garland' (V.3.16).<sup>41</sup>

Emilia's horrified reaction to her treatment by Theseus is worth quoting in full:

What sins have I committed, chaste Diana,  
That my unspotted youth must now be soiled  
With blood of princes, and my chastity  
Be made the altar where the lives of lovers  
[...]

must be the sacrifice

To my unhappy beauty? (IV.2.58-64)

This image of unspoiled youth stained by blood is an obvious reminder of her virginal state. As Emilia's virginity is offered to the knights by Theseus, she describes her chastity, fittingly, as an altar. The theme of sacrifice runs throughout the play; the altar image ominously yields to the scaffold of the final scene. Emilia watches as the sacrificial hind is replaced by a rose, a transformation she (wrongly) takes as a sign that she may 'grow alone, unplucked' (V.1.168). She adopts the rose as a sign of her own agency because it protects its virtue by pricking those who would pluck it and seals

<sup>39</sup> Lois Potter, 'Introduction', in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon McMullan, 'A Rose for Emilia: Collaborative Relations in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*', in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices, Bodies, Spaces, 1580-1690*, ed. by Gordon McMullan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 129-47 (p. 138).

<sup>41</sup> Laurie J. Shannon, 'Emilia's Argument: Friendship and 'Human Title' in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*', *ELH*, 64.3 (Fall, 1997), 657-82 (p. 668).

itself against trespassers. However, just as the flower dies, so she must succumb to Theseus's ruling. In her desire to protect her chastity Emilia stands in stark contrast with the Gaoler's Daughter whose desire for a sexual relationship with Palamon leads to madness, and whose only 'cure' lies in rape. To resist or to acquiesce: in the world of *Kinsmen* both these strategies end badly for women.

Laurie Shannon is right to claim that in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the Amazon comes across as the 'voice of reasoning autonomy and critique of absolutism'.<sup>42</sup> However, I have gone further to show how Emilia's efforts to remain a virgin become a sign of proactive resistance to the will of the sovereign, as well as a politically charged desire for personal agency. Whilst Elizabeth had used her chastity to project an image of inviolability and assertion of a specifically female power, the new Jacobean ethic posits marriage as the manifestation of the monarch's control over his subjects *and* his family. Pirithous even marries Hippolyta in place of Theseus in a proxy wedding which directly echoes the 1601 wedding of Anna to a Scottish nobleman who stood in for the absent King. The theme of containment by marriage and the silencing of Emilia play a critical part in the successful assertion of a newly patriarchal Jacobean ethic.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* we must see marriage as political, not personal; the 'knot' of love between husband and wife also signifies the bond of allegiance to a sovereign power. As we shall see in the court masques, the ritual of marriage is the process by which a foreign queen becomes absorbed in the political infrastructure of her husband but that process of absorption is often tense and unstable. Theseus and Hippolyta's marriage in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is indefinitely postponed, unlike in *The Knight's Tale*, and the eventual marriage of Emilia takes place offstage outside the confines of the play, and is forcefully resisted, as I have already shown. Moreover, in *Kinsmen*, the nobleman Pirithous is as tightly tied to Theseus by a 'knot of love' as Hippolyta; since Arcite and Palamon are described in similar terms, that 'knot' is obviously precarious (I.3.41). In this play, friendship, not marriage, is described as a merging of equals; Arcite describes how he and Palamon 'are an endless mine to one another' (II.2.79). Their relationship erases the boundaries between two

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<sup>42</sup> Shannon, 'Emilia's Argument', p. 676.

identical selves, a distorted version of Emilia's idea of marriage as engendering extinction or obliteration. After his final victory, Arcite suffers a fatal accident, which leaves Palamon free to claim Emilia. Now Theseus can '[s]mile with Palamon', even whilst, as he says, 'one hour since, I was as dearly sorry | As glad of Arcite, and am now as glad | As for him sorry (V.4.128-31). Theseus's words draw attention to the indistinguishable nature of the kinsmen as well as the arbitrariness of their contest.

The chivalric idealisation of combat is offset in *Kinsmen* by images of decay and revulsion such as the blood-stained corpse that lies face-up, '[s]howing the sun his teeth, grinning at the moon' (I.1.100). Although the field of battle holds its horrors, there is a distinct fear that peace threatens masculinity; peace, in this play, is degrading. Arcite describes how it sullies 'our gloss of youth' (I.2.5). Similarly in *Bonduca*, peace is seen as implying subjugation. The queen's cousin and champion Caratech warns against complacency even after their great victory over the Romans; when Nennius asks 'Is not Peace the end of Arms?', Caratech responds 'Not where the cause implies a general Conquest' (I.1.152-53). Peace here is taken to be the manifestation of subservience; it threatens to efface national pride. I have argued already that the play is concerned by the prospect of female community, but it also shows the bonds between male communities as fragile and vulnerable.

In *Valentinian*, first performed a year or so before *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Fletcher had already addressed militarism from the perspective of the unemployed soldier in peacetime. Just like *Kinsmen*, Fletcher's *Valentinian* offers a vision of soldiers perplexed by an unjust war and also the 'problem' of peace for soldiering. It manifests clear concerns about the nature of war and reckless military aggression. Aecius, a noble captain, warns his superiors about insurrection as his successful army falls into disrepair and petty rivalry; he describes,

[T]he nations, whom our ancient virtue

With many a weary march and hunger conquer'd,

With losse of many a daring life subdude,  
 Fall from their faire obedience.<sup>43</sup>

Just as in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, in *Valentinian* martial glory can only temporarily conceal a diminished ethical system. Towards the end of the play, honourable and dishonourable die alongside one another, a final rejection of a chivalric system that rewards honour with victory. In *Kinsmen*, Arcite's victory over Palamon and his accidental death epitomise this rejection.

The pageant of knights in Act V marks another important moment of scepticism about chivalric romance in *Kinsmen*. The explicitly erotic descriptions of the knights are designed to complicate further the assumptions about the maleness of chivalric performance. Pirithous describes Palamon as a fecund woman, swollen like 'woman new conceived', 'prone to labour', terms which conflate femininity with martial glory. Palamon is described as half warrior, half lover: 'when he smiles | He shows a lover; when he frowns, a soldier' (IV.2.135-36). Pirithous' depiction of Palamon complicates the common, simplistic association of Palamon and Arcite with Venus and Mars by merging the attributes of Mars and Venus into one man; a man who merges hyper-maleness with an idealised yet feminine gentleness and courtliness. Fletcher's *Bonduca* also draws attention to the eroticised performance of war, as we see in Caratach's words:

I love an enemy: I was born a souldier;  
 And he that in the head on's Troop defies me,  
 Bending my manly body with his sword,  
 I make a Mistris. Yellow-tressed Hymen  
 Ne'er ty'd a longing Virgin with more joy,  
 Then I am married to that man that wounds me. (I.1.57-62)

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<sup>43</sup> John Fletcher, 'Valentinian', in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 261-415, I.3.73-75. All subsequent references are to this edition.

We see here images of penetration and masochism and the combination of ideals of military prestige with an erotic relationship; the violence here creates a sensuous physical relationship between a warrior and his enemy that is depicted in terms of a marriage.

The figure of the Amazon represents both the emasculating effects of military conquest and the feminisation of soldiery (as we shall see later in consideration of various Jacobean court masques). In Act I, Theseus sees danger in the abdication of male resolve, he tells the queens: 'As we are men, | Thus should we do; being sensually subdued, | We lose our human title' (I.1.231-33). In Act V Arcite refers to intercession but interestingly it is here a male political tool, rather than the female one with which we are familiar; he describes,

Our intercession then  
Must be to him that makes the camp a cistern  
Brimmed with the blood of men. Give me your aid  
And bend your spirits towards him. (V.1.45-48)

Here Arcite insists upon the destabilisation of normal gendered roles by aligning the young men in this scene with the kneeling, petitioning queens of the first. I have shown above that the post-Elizabethan return to intercession as a source of power also contains the threat of challenge and subversion. In *Puzzling Shakespeare*, Leah S. Marcus suggests that the new Jacobean age saw a 'massive but futile attempt to slough off the "Monstrous Regiment of Women" and all the superstitions and inhibitions associated with female rule, in favour of an aggressive and highly masculinist Protestant militarism'.<sup>44</sup> She sees the shift from Elizabethanism to Jacobeanism as the process of casting off the nightmare of female autonomy and militancy. However, from the resistance of the widowed queens at the start of the play to the masque-like ritual sacrifice of Emilia at the end, I have shown here that a subversive female power still courses through *Kinsmen*; power based on a self-contained and exclusively female community as well as a power that is derived from the articulation of resistance even under the guise of intercessory influence.

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<sup>44</sup> Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 91.

In conclusion, in section II I have shown that the updating of the *Knight's Tale* theme necessitates a re-working of tropes of chivalric honour and prestige. In *Kinsmen*, queens do not passively 'receive' the service of knights; they have become themselves the architects of military campaigns and political resistance. This has implications for the chivalric ritual of service to ladies and also for the new articulation of female power. The perplexed figure of the Amazon in *Kinsmen* and the female militancy of *Bonduca* portray a newly problematic model of queenship; one that sits between the hyper-masculine display of arms (the female warrior) and the eroticised object of the public gaze (the vulnerable, kneeling woman) as I shall explore more fully in the next section.

### III Re-forming Queenship: Anna and the Return of the Amazon

I have shown that we can usefully consider *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alongside *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to explore how ideals of queenship changed between the Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns. In this next section I will explore how the Jacobean court masques aid in that transition. Here I will consider how Anna's masques mediate between the nostalgic militarism of Prince Henry and the pacifism of King James and I will argue that her masques reveal a new post-Elizabethan ideal and conception of queenship, albeit one that is firmly rooted in the past. The resurgent image of the Amazon here, and renewed emphasis on female militancy point to an effort by Anna to re-inscribe herself in an historical context of autonomous queenship. At the same time, in the court masques her power often derives from her ability to intercede or mediate between her husband, her family and her people.

Plenty of critical work has been done on the court masques, which I will survey briefly here. With their celebration of sovereignty and power, their political symbolism, their ceremonial formality and ideological content, the masques have most commonly been co-opted by New Historicist critics who are interested in the methods whereby power is enforced and legitimated. New Historicists consider in particular the cultural manifestation of political power; Stephen Orgel

famously described the masques as theatres of power; expressions of the monarch's will and sovereign power.<sup>45</sup> According to Orgel, they take on an explicitly political ideology which affirms the patriarchal authority of the new king. Martin Butler has also argued that masques are 'symbolic instances of the necessary and disabling involvement of cultural production in the economies of power'; like Orgel, he sees them as serving the needs of Jacobean, and Stuart, absolutist power.<sup>46</sup>

New Historicist critics tend to argue that Jonson's masques deprive Anna of power; Orgel for example asserts that 'female chivalry ... leaves male power unaffected: unmoved, unthreatened, uncompromised'.<sup>47</sup> He even sees the presentation of female subversion in *The Masque of Queens* as an effort to please the king, whose interest in demonology and witchcraft was well known. Martin Butler also reads her masques as a narrative of femininity subordinated by masculine control, arguing that the Perseus myth portrayed in *Queens* depends upon the repression of the feminine; he argues that the hero can achieve his heroic status only after, and as a direct result of, the removal of the monstrous female display.<sup>48</sup> Orgel also sees the court masques as opening a window onto the precise historical moment of their composition: for example, he sees the maritime imagery and witchcraft of *The Masque of Beauty* as an evocation of Anna's famously stormy sea voyage to Scotland in 1590, a voyage popularly rumoured to have been cursed.<sup>49</sup> More recent critics have argued that their allegorical significance is less literal and more thematic; they link the masques to wider political issues more than to specific events. Peter Holbrook, for example, has argued that *The Masque of Queens* 'skilfully uses the discourse of war to make honourable the cause of peace'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: University of California University Press, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Butler, 'Courtly Negotiations', in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* ed. by David Bevington and David Holbrook (Leeds: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 20-41 (p. 21).

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Orgel, 'Jonson and the Amazons' in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-century English Poetry*, ed. by Elizabeth Harvey and Katherine Eisaman Maus (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 119-43 (p. 134).

<sup>48</sup> Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (Leeds: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> Orgel, 'Jonson and the Amazons', p. 125.

<sup>50</sup> Holbrook, 'Jacobean Masques and the Jacobean Peace', in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, pp. 67-88 (p. 78).

According to him, the masques' blurring of discourses of peace and valour symbolically represents the tension between the pacificism of King James and the nostalgia for Elizabethan military honour that was particularly associated with the court of Prince Henry. I have already shown in my discussion of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Valentinian* that a concern about the decay of chivalry is clearly identifiable on the public stage in the Jacobean period.

Similarly to *Dream* and *Kinsmen*, our understanding of the court masques has been affected by a common critical tendency to read them as allegory, as examples of whatever contemporary political meaning critics set out to look for in advance. The problem with these critical readings is that they become self-fulfilling; if we look at masques as representations of prevailing power structures, then we are likely to find *only* those power structures. Allegorical readings of the masques as part of a factional contest between James's pacificism and Henry's militancy do not sufficiently take into account the fact that Anna used her performances in the masques to cast her own personality over the court, to assert a new and individual form of queenship; they erroneously render her a mute participant in a battle between the two men. New Historicist critics argue that the queen's masques tell us about expectations for her formal role but they do not set out to stamp a specific personality over the court. In fact, as I shall show, her masques take an archaic vision of female militancy and mix it with visions of her domestic intercessory influence, thereby transforming the queen's role into a uniquely individuated public office.

The other important strand of court masque criticism that has emerged in recent years is that articulated by feminist critics. These critics argue that Anna uses her masques to formulate an idealised vision of her new queenship rooted in new articulation of female power. Barbara Lewalski, for example, considers Anna's masques as expressions of the queen's cultural and political power; she argues, in contrast to Orgel and others, that they actually *contest* the 'symbolism of Jacobean patriarchy and absolutism'.<sup>51</sup> Kathryn Schwartz, too, suggests that the masques publicly re-constitute

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<sup>51</sup> Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Anna of Denmark and the Subversions of Masquing', *Criticism*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer, 1993), 341-55 (p. 341).



female power by placing it at the very heart of the political establishment; she argues that masques 'bring martial women in from the margins'.<sup>52</sup> These critics read a subversive female identity in these masques and resist Orgel's reading of the masques solely as expressions of female servility and propaganda intended simply to bolster the reputation of the king.

Anna's masques enact resistance and opposition to patriarchal authority in various ways; for example, the queen's decision to blacken her face and arms in performance of *The Masque of Blackness* and its sequel *The Masque of Beauty* represents a deliberate assertion of physical sexual power as well as independence from ritualised codes of female decorum. The reception to *Blackness* suggests that its erotic corporeality was recognised as transgressive by its audience (rather than the fact of female performance per se), as we can see in Sir Dudley Carleton's famously outraged response to Anna's appearance. Carleton exclaims:

Their Apparell was rich, but too light and Curtizan-like for such great ones. Instead of Vizzards, their Faces and Arms up to the Elbows, were painted black, which was Disguise sufficient, for they were hard to be known; but it be came them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly sight, then a Troop of lean-cheek'd Moors.<sup>53</sup>

In *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama*, Sophie Tomlinson considers the role of masques in the context of changes in the self-representation of women in the early modern period; she sees the queen's performance in masques such as *Blackness* as allowing for the possibility of marital insubordination but also offering potentially threatening female political aspiration. She argues that the very fact of female performance 'inaugurates a shift in the conception of subjectivity'; through their presence on the masquing stage, women find a new dramatic voice, one that enables greater subjectivity and autonomy.<sup>54</sup> Tomlinson argues that Fame's trumpet in *The Masque of Queens*

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<sup>52</sup> Kathryn Schwartz, 'Amazon Reflections in the Jacobean Queen's Masque', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring, 1995), 293-319 (p. 296).

<sup>53</sup> 'Sir Dudley Carleton to Sir Ralph Winwood', 1605, cited in *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925-52), 10: 448.

<sup>54</sup> Sophie Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3.

‘attests to the nobility of Bel-Anna’s ‘speaking actions’; concurring with Clare McManus who saw Heroic Virtue by contrast as ‘static, verbose but essentially weak’.<sup>55</sup> Tomlinson concludes that militant queens find a heroic referent in Anna, not James, and therefore that the theatrical spectacle is one of female empowerment not subservience. Feminist critics are united in arguing that the masques represent an important moment in the authorisation of female voices on the public stage.

In *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, Clare McManus also considers the masques as manifestations of the queen’s agency, finding within them evidence of the high political and cultural status of elite female courtiers and of the queen herself. She agrees with Tomlinson in her view that Anna’s masques mark the real initiation of the tradition of public female performance. McManus considers the masque as a physical manifestation of the power structures of the court as she examines its role in the construction of the court’s gender dynamics. She concludes that the formal constraints of the masque form and women’s confined role within it (costume and movement but no speech) paradoxically allows her to stray beyond the boundaries of the mere physical. It is also the case that the dramatic unveiling of the queen’s body, her adoption of mythological and historical forms, as well as the associative power of allegory give her a uniquely autonomous role even despite her silence on stage.

As we have seen above, a debate continues to rage over whether Anna’s masques underwrite a display of female autonomy as feminist critics have claimed, or whether instead they confirm an existing patriarchal power structure, disempowering women by rendering them subject to James’s superior authority. I think that masques enable a presentation of female agency that the public theatre does not, because a woman’s presence on stage enables a synthesis of female cultural agency with her autonomous performance. Even despite her silence, through her presence on stage the queen is able to take an important role in the process of fashioning courtly and physical identity through display. The eroticised nature of her costumes is clear from surviving costume designs for

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<sup>55</sup> *Women on Stage*, p. 35; Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, p. 133.

*The Masque of Queens*; martial costumes and headdresses and exposed breasts and abdomen imply that the female body is, itself, a site of ideological conflict between militant heroism and female erotic desire. Therefore rebellion and subversion take physical form in the queen's masques even despite the limitations placed on women by conventions of decorum. In *The Masque of Blackness*, for example, Anna's obviously pregnant condition (she was seven months' pregnant at the time) finds a parallel in the masque's vision of troubling female corporeality, what McManus describes as a threatening 'openly consummated female sexuality'.<sup>56</sup> Both the queen's black face and her exposed pregnant stomach are indicators of a threatening 'otherness', an unrestrained autonomy that renders her performance politically as well as physically subversive.

Certainly Anna found a new means of expression through the masques, and she did so even despite the formal constraints of the masque form on its female performers. Nevertheless, whilst the individual focus on Anna is important, I think even feminist critics have tended not to be concerned enough with the masques' *historical* perspectives on being a queen. Anna's ideas about queenship are manifested in masques in a deliberately historicised form. I now need to explore further the masques' vision of a historically consistent queenship and their engagement with an older field of materials on 'how to be queen'; their revival of and engagement with earlier models of queenship. I seek to demonstrate that Anna establishes a new form of intercessory queenship and that she does so both by reverting, apparently paradoxically, to earlier forms of militant queenship as well as by adopting the Elizabethan iconography of virginity and chastity.

#### **a) Court masques as expressions of conflict**

If we look more closely at the king's masques, we can see that they promote a mild, intercessory queenship that fits in with the tradition of how-to-be-queen manuals I examined in earlier chapters. We saw there that both medieval and early modern manuals written to dictate the behaviour of

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<sup>56</sup> McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, p. 16.

women emphasise the need for her influence and opinion to be applied with humility and, critically, must be *privately* applied. Caxton, for example, suggested that:

A Quene ought to be chaste, wyse, of honest peple well manerd and not curious in nourisshynge of her children, her wysedom ought not only tappere in feet and werkes but also in spekyng .... A Quene oughte to be well mannered and amonge all she oughte to be tymerous and shamefast.<sup>57</sup>

We can identify here an hierarchy of chastity, wisdom and honesty, as well as the plea that she be discreet in her speech. Sir Thomas Elyot described idealised feminine traits in strikingly similar terms in *The Boke of the Governour* written in 1531, arguing that ‘the good nature of a woman is to be mild, timorous, tractable, benign, of sure resemblance, and shamefast’.<sup>58</sup> We have seen in earlier chapters how breaches of this expectation for the *private* application of influence lead to particular criticism of women.

In the king’s masque, *Hymenaei*, female characters conform to the tropes identified above; in fact they are totally silent, transformed from statues into living women only in order that they might be led out to dance by male masquers. Their presentation conforms to an ideal of female silence commonly seen in advice manuals for women which assert a link between silence and female chastity. Nevertheless, this silence hints at something darker; I argued on page 193 that the reference to Hippolyta in *Dream* as Theseus’s ‘pale companion’ hints at melancholia even despite his instruction to ‘turn melancholy forth’ (I.1.14). The problem of how to read female silence in the context of physical performance is a source of conflict in the masques too.

In *Hymenaei*, the king settles conflicts; he ‘wins natures, sexes, minds | And every discord in true music brings’, even while the masque is dominated by threats to that unity, physically

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<sup>57</sup> William Caxton, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, ed. by Jenny Adams (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, ed. by Donald W. Rude (New York, NY: Garland, 1992), I:xxi, p. 93.

presented in the tense relations between the four humours and four affections.<sup>59</sup> James's other role here is to control female sexual ambition; without him, for example, 'Venus can do nought, | Save what with shame is bought' (300-1). Again, his ability to do so is under near-constant threat. In the later debate between Truth and Opinion, Truth asserts that 'the virgin were a strange and stubborn thing | Would longer stay a virgin than to bring | Herself fit use and profit in a mate' (733-5). Here the reluctance of the virgin to yield 'profit' by way of her marriage echoes Emilia's attempted resistance to Theseus in *Kinsmen*; I have shown how in that play chastity is re-inscribed as opposition. This masque is similarly concerned to valorise marriage rather than chastity. In *Hymenaei* alone, Anna is allegorised as Juno, not as Pallas, restricting potentially problematic references to the Virgin Queen by way of Athena or Astraea. *Hymenaei* clearly sets out to valorise the consort by emphasising her duties of support and partnership.

We saw in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* how marriage plays a political role, not a personal or sentimental one; the same image of the 'knot' of love between husband and wife in that play signified the bond of allegiance to a sovereign power. Marriage is described similarly in *Hymenaei*, clear from Reason's description of the bride in that masque:

The zone of wool about her waist,  
Which, in contrary circles cast,  
Doth meet in one strong knot that binds,  
Tells you, so should all married minds. (173-76)

The focus on marriage in the king's masques is often read by New Historicists as an allegorisation of the union between England and Scotland under James. As in *Kinsmen*, here a foreign queen must be assimilated within the political infrastructure of her husband but the process of assimilation is troubled; the relationship between king and queen is seen as suffocating:

Soft embraces bind

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<sup>59</sup> Ben Jonson, 'Hymenaei', in *The Complete Masques*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 75-106 (p. 82). All subsequent references are to this edition.

To each the other's mind,  
Which may no power untie  
Till one or both must die. (468-71)

This passage reminds us of Emilia's words, cited earlier, because of its suggestion that release from the bondage of marriage only comes with death.

Ultimately, *Hymenaei* is about a quest for harmony and unity and within those terms of reference, the role of marriage is to settle discord, clear in the affirmation that '[n]ow no affections rage nor humors swell, | But all composèd dwell' (296-97). Yet in its insistence on the virtues of marriage and unity the masque raises some interesting, and familiar, problems about the potential for resistance and of a female power that is derived from a woman's marital role. In *Hymenaei*, even the ritual of marriage is dominated, unusually, by the bridegroom not the bride. The groom leads the way, 'his hair short and bound with particoloured ribbons and gold twist, his garments purple and white', followed by Hymen the god of marriage, then finally a youth 'attired in white bearing another light of white thorn' (39-40,46). Men dressed in white to signify their virginity lead the bride, 'her hair flowing loose', to denote her similar virginity. Later on, Truth will claim that: 'The most honored state of man and wife | Doth far exceed th'insociate virgin life' (641-42). Ultimately, we see here that *Hymenaei* insists upon the married state as one of strength in union and compliance but it is a state in which male actions frame female actions.

There is also evidence of instability even despite the characterisation of marriage as strong and unified; most obviously in the fact that the bride is routinely described in terms of 'sacrifice' (95). In another link to *Kinsmen*, the altar of the opening scene becomes the marital bed of the last; Reason refers to 'this altar' which he describes as 'but a sign | Of one more soft and more divine, | The genial bed' (147-49). This masque offers a familiar vision of the woman as completely silent, a symptom of ownership which passed to her husband on the occasion of her wedding; she is a 'faint and trembling bride | That quakes to touch her bridegroom's side' (369-70). In a later masque for

the king, *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly*, performed in 1616, the figure of the king combines both male *and* female attributes and marriage elides both male and female characteristics into one:

The contraries which time till now  
Nor fate knew where to join, or how,  
Are majesty and love, which there,  
And no where also, have their true sphere. (248-51)

The solution to the fragility of gender relations here is the *actual* absorption of the woman; the obliteration of any gender difference (a version of Emilia's claim in *Kinsmen* that after marriage, she will be 'extinct').

The depiction of the king in the Prince's masques, *The Masque of Oberon* and *Prince Henry's Barriers*, is complicated by a portrayal of heroism that is *not* the king's. It has been suggested that all the court masques of the Jacobean period ought to be read as an expression of factionalism in the royal family.<sup>60</sup> James's reign was marked by growing nostalgia for the martial glory and glamour of the Elizabethan age; James 'loves quiet and repose, has no inclination to war, nay is opposed to it, a fact that little pleases many of his subjects', the Venetian ambassador writes in 1607.<sup>61</sup> By 1610, Prince Henry's court was a gathering ground for those with attitudes that were out of step with the King's court. The same ambassador reports that the prince was 'obeyed and loved by the military party' and his 'whole talk was of arms and war'.<sup>62</sup> Henry campaigned for popular naval and judicial reforms, and he was popular on account of his personal piety. Henry's attempt to reconcile the opportunities for heroism offered by war with James's quest for unity, stability and peace was problematic and tensions become clear in competing iconographies of the respective courts; as

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<sup>60</sup> Leah S. Marcus, "'Present occasions' and the shaping of Ben Jonson's masques", *English Literary History* 45 (1978), 201-25.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Peter Holbrook, 'Jacobean masques and the Jacobean peace', in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1610-1613*, Vol 12, Letter 692, p. 450.

Butler argues, Henry 'unsettled his father's culture and iconography' via the establishment of his own heroic persona.<sup>63</sup>

*The Masque of Oberon* certainly negotiates fault-lines between father and son and exposes a rivalry between the two. Although notionally danced in homage to James, *Oberon* offers a challenge to him by setting up Henry as a political player in his own right. By placing Henry alongside an iconography of militarism, Protestantism and nostalgic chivalry, the masque becomes an expression of an alternative political aspiration to that of James. The masque describes James as Oberon; of his desire, it claims, 'nothing can be higher'.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, we see from this that in *Oberon* Henry's political aspiration is contained; even though *Oberon* shows Henry as a competitor to his father's political authority, the primary focus of admiration is always the king. Although it was written for Prince Henry, it ultimately asserts the king's sovereignty over his son. The prince's masques diminish Henry in various ways by calling into question those chivalric ideals with which Henry associated himself. I have shown earlier how a focus on the needs of succession is manifested in news of Anne's delivery of Elizabeth in *Henry VIII* which regenerates Henry, and enables Cranmer's vision of the phoenix rising. Similarly, the masques for Prince Henry show James performing a role as successful monarch by way of a paternal performance. Crucially, the vision of James as 'father' of a nation presents a performance of sovereign success as well as a contrast to Elizabeth's barrenness and chastity. *Oberon* shows near constant interest in the idea of proper succession, seen for example in the following quotation which describes how '[p]rincely Ob'ron and these knights | May, without stop point out the proper heir | Designed so long to Arthur's crowns and chair' (282-84). Henry's masques work to create a familial unit whose function is not to eclipse him, but to validate and glorify James, to inscribe an 'harmonious sphere of love'. The queen's masques, by contrast, tend to present instead a performance that emphasises political, rather than familial, influence.

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<sup>63</sup> Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque*, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Ben Jonson, 'The Masque of Oberon', in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, pp. 159-173 (lines 223-25).



In *Oberon*, the prince is presented as an erotic object of male attention as well as an idealised prince. McManus sees his revealing costume as a 'demonstration of fitness to rule', but I think that effeminacy and erotic militarism also serve as a response to the women of Anna's masques, who stray beyond the confines of their role and adopt masculine postures which are, ultimately, unsustainable.<sup>65</sup> In section II I discussed the eroticised treatment of the chivalric heroes Arcite and Palamon in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and I made the point that these eroticised descriptions are both glorifying *and* confining. In that play, Pirithous described Palamon as a fecund woman, swollen like 'woman new conceived', 'prone to labour'; terms which conflate femininity with martial glory. Palamon is literally half warrior, half lover, 'when he smiles | He shows a lover; where he frowns, a soldier' (IV.2.135-36). Those examples merge symbols of hyper-maleness with a vision of an idealised yet feminine gentleness and courtliness very similar to the depiction of Prince Henry in *Oberon*, where he is described in terms of grace, virtue and beauty:

Beauty dwells but in his face:

He's the height of all our race.

[...]

He is lovelier than in May

Is the Spring, and there can stay

As little as he can decay. (47-48; 54-56)

The prince's beauty and youth are temporary, though, just like the 'painted beauties' of *Blackness* (133). In *Oberon* and *Blackness* the physical manifestation of beauty is equally important but differently expressed; in *Oberon* Henry has a beautiful face, whilst the women of *Blackness*, 'black in face', are full of 'life and light' (82; 84). The comparison necessarily draws attention to the contrast between *Blackness*' community of women and *Oberon*'s community of male satyrs and knights masquers. In *Blackness* the women seek their desire in Albion, but they never find it; they exist in a state of isolation and flux. Like the women of *Blackness*, Henry's physical beauty is transient;

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<sup>65</sup> McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, p. 48.

vulnerable, like all things, to the decay of time. The women of *Blackness*, in whose black faces ‘the perfect’st beauty grows’, are terrified of ageing: ‘No cares, no age can change, or there display | The fearful tincture of abhorred grey’.<sup>66</sup> In fact, they fear to end up as the noble, matronly consort of *Hymenaei* for whom age, not youth, was the designator of beauty; grey hair, in the latter, designated wisdom and dignity: ‘Her hair [...] | Is shed with grey, to intimate | She ent’reth to a matron’s state’ (163-66).

We also saw in *Kinsmen* how peace can be degrading to chivalric aspiration; Arcite described how it did ‘sully our gloss of youth’ (l.2.5). There is a similar fear in *Oberon* that peace threatens masculinity, manifested in its idle and vapid satyrs who sit around aimlessly awaiting direction and a purpose. As in *Kinsmen*, here male communities are fragile and vulnerable; chivalry enables heroic acts but it also problematises male relationships (we might compare, for example, the fractious satyrs with Arcite and Palamon’s bickering). *Prince Henry’s Barriers* asserts the sovereign power of James in its reminder that good government is not just about glamorous military campaigns; Henry’s greatest ancestors are praised for their roles in bringing peace and justice, for services to trade and farming. Even those ancestors traditionally famed for their heroism are not praised in those terms in this masque which focuses, for example, on Edward III’s ‘tempered zeal’ rather than his famous French campaigns. It presents the Black Prince as a subject and obedient son, resisting the temptation to compare the militancy and heroics of the Black Prince with the object of the masque itself. The Black Prince

tears

From the Bohemian crown the plume he wears,

Which after for his crest he did preserve

To his father’s use with this fit word: I serve.<sup>67</sup> (255-58)

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<sup>66</sup> Jonson, ‘The Masque of Blackness’, in *The Complete Masques*, pp. 47-60 (lines 122-23)

<sup>67</sup> Jonson, ‘Prince Henry’s Barriers’, in *The Complete Masques*, pp. 142-58 (lines 255-58)

In other words, the military successes of the Black Prince here become public statements of his allegiance to his father. Despite the message of peace on Arthur's shield, the triviality of archaic chivalric tradition becomes clear; even the golden fleece becomes an emblem of the clothing trade. James has the power to stop the decay of time, to fix fast '[t]he wheel of chance about which kings are hurled' (356-57); Elizabeth's 'great wall of shipping' is vulnerable, transient, by contrast.

So, as in *Oberon*, in *Barriers* the ideal exercise of sovereign power lies in James who is Arthur's 'proper heir'; a unifying figure, pacific and benevolent, 'he knows both how to govern, how to save, | What subjects, what their contraries should have, | What can be done by power and what by love' (349-50). The Lady of the Lake describes how James 'claims Arthur's seat' (21); Arthurianism here operates as an allegory for successful kingship; the Jacobean age is 'brighter far than when our Arthur lived' (24). *Barriers'* Arthurian mythology glorifies the unification of Britain under James; *he* becomes the exemplar of knightliness restoring chivalry's ruined house. It echoes the personification of James as King Arthur in *Oberon* in which he desires his son to be an exemplar of chivalric values, comparing James to the greatest of Arthur's knights (not coincidentally, in particular those famous for service to women); he says, '[l]et him be famous, as was Tristram, Tor, | Lanc'lot, and all our list of knighthood' (86-87). Because of *Barriers'* effort to present James's kingship in a favourable light *versus* his greatest forebears, Elizabeth I is conspicuously *not* portrayed as martial in this masque. She is 'dear-beloved of heaven' who inspires the greatest of knights, but she is not military herself (299). In the next section I will prove that Anna's masques directly portray the consequences of unrestrained female militancy, militancy which is conspicuously absent here. In *Barriers* Anna is simply seen as a consort, she has no agency; she is an extension of the King clear in the masque's appeal to James and his wife as 'you, and your other you, great king and queen' (407).

Despite common critical suggestions that the masques are defined by familial factionalism, I have shown that there are striking parallels between James and Henry's masques and that an emphasis on familial unity links the two. In the next section I will consider how the queen's masques complement the prince's in the sense that whilst they suggest resistance to patriarchal power, at the

same time they also affirm its reach. The queen's masques use militaristic imagery to suggest an alternative heroic community; with their active display of female heroism and autonomy they do *look* like they offer a challenge to the absolute sovereignty of James's court and the king's power is certainly problematised by the wife's display. Samuel Daniel's *Vision of Twelve Goddesses* shows self-sufficient women 'hand in hand' free from male interference whilst the female communities of the queen's masques usually become stronger in isolation from men.<sup>68</sup> But Anna's masques are more than just an expression of familial unity; they also contain a desire for mediative influence *over* the two, in essence a reversion to a pre-Elizabethan intercessory model of queenship which, as I have shown in earlier chapters, derives its power *through* marriage.

#### **b) Anna's Re-Formed Queenship**

In their engagement with history and myth, Anna's masques offer a direct response to the chivalric archaism of the male masques and also a statement of her political influence over her husband's court. The *form* of that influence is significant, and familiar from my earlier work on intercessory or indirect female power. We saw in chapter 1 that in *Morte Darthur* Malory showed Arthur's marriage as yielding stability, authority and legitimacy as well as acting as a forum for the administration of justice and a channel for communication between the king and his nobles. In this section, I will consider how the masques' presentation of queenship and marriage relates to an ongoing historical debate about the political consequences of unrestrained female power. How do you wrestle back control from uncontrollable female communities? You marry them; thereby re-inscribing female power as mediative rather than autonomous. I argue, in short, that the new inscription of Jacobean queenship might be read as a form of intercessory power familiar from earlier chapters.

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel Daniel, *Vision of Twelve Goddesses*, ed. by Ernest Law (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1880), p. 63.

The Jacobean court masques are self-consciously historical because of their interest in an heroic past, their nostalgia and their use of chivalric ritual. I have considered them in the context of both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* because all these texts contain divergent portrayals of their warrior queens and they are also linked by their *historical* perspectives on idealised queenship. The consistent portrayal of Anna as Diana and Astraea throughout her masques (*Tethys*, *Queens*, *Beauty* and *Blackness*) operates as a kind of cultural shorthand, an attempt to appropriate the iconography and nostalgia surrounding Elizabeth and thereby absorb her mythical status. By contrast I identified earlier hints of disquiet in *Dream's* vision of idealised Elizabethan female performance and I have discussed *Kinsmen's* effort to absorb the Amazon queen, to re-tool her as an intercessory consort and to cast into silence any hint of her martial past.

In Daniel's *Tethys' Festival*, presented alongside *The Masque of Oberon* in June 1610 on the occasion of Henry's investiture as Prince of Wales, Anna performed as Astraea, a performance which pointed to the recovery of an Elizabethan golden age because, like Diana, Astraea was a figure often associated with the late queen. Daniel's masque clearly links the return of the Elizabethan golden age to Henry's investiture as heir. Anna's fictional rendition of her own queenship is consistently framed in terms of a queen who spent most of her career reluctant to cede power to a potential husband even in the face of grave political concerns. Yet Anna is no Emilia protesting her own independence; rather, she inscribes her married state via performance. Joined on stage by her daughter Elizabeth and her youngest son Charles, Duke of York, she portrays a tableau that is obviously intended to present family strength and unity. Tomlinson points out that the nature of her influence is rendered here through an emphatically dynamic linguistic structure consisting of a series of active and present tense verbs (she 'resolves', 'wills', 'summons'), all of which highlight her proactive autonomy and her political agency.<sup>69</sup> In a sense, this masque sets out to combine the Elizabethan glamour of the autonomous queen with the Jacobean ideal of the familial consort. Anna's masques might be seen as valorising male power by calling for the suppression of female

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<sup>69</sup> Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama*, p. 37.

militancy and promoting compliant marriage. Anna's new mythology is certainly (as we saw from *Tethys*) hugely informed by ties of family, of history and of community. Yet at the same time, fears about her influence, expressed in terms of militancy, androgyny and foreignness familiar from the histories of Guenevere, Margaret, Joan of Arc, are reflected in the re-appearance of the Amazon in this period. The resurgent figure of the Amazon complicates both the hyper-masculine display of arms and the vision of the queen as the passive, eroticised object of the public gaze because it calls attention to the unlimited autonomy of self-contained female communities as well as to the precedent of active female leadership. All of the queen's masques are linked by a presentation of a community of women that is rooted in the language of resistance, resistance which links us back with Hippolyta's plea to her husband at the start of *Kinsmen* where she suggested that she must act for her community of women, or else 'pluck | All ladies' scandal on me' (1.1.191-92).

*The Masque of Queens* presents Anna's ladies-in-waiting as Amazons; its focus is on militant female virtue and female heroism manifested physically by way of martial costumes, breastplates, helmets and swords. In a way it might be read as a female counterpart to *The Masque of Oberon* with that masque's questioning of male chivalric endeavour, as I discussed earlier. In associating herself with the mythic figure of the Amazon queen, Anna creates a myth of origins to compete with the chivalric nostalgia of Prince Henry's masques. In *Queens*, it is always clear that the queen's power is vested in her physical valour which gives her a '*princely*' virtue (my italics), rather than in her sacred modesty (416). Elizabeth I usually referred to herself as 'prince' rather than as queen; an effort to minimise concerns about her femaleness and her consequent ability to govern effectively.

The individual histories of the Amazon queens (their power is both rooted in and derived from the death of their husbands) and the sense that Bel-Anna has absorbed the powers of the witches of the antimasque have led to suggestions that *Queens* is a representation of Jacobean nightmares about the public performance of queenship. Orgel, for example, describes *Queens* as

displaying absolute terror about the 'limits of Jacobean patriarchy'.<sup>70</sup> *The Masque of Queens* directly transposes female heroism with masculinity and in so doing it transforms displays of female sovereignty into a series of assaults on men; each one of the queens represents a violent martial history because by definition an Amazon queen can only exist after the death of the king her husband. Therefore, as Schwartz points out, '*Queens* parades before its royal audience a more relentless hostility than any suggested by the witches' threats'.<sup>71</sup> *Queens* renders clearly the primary paradox of the Amazon; hyper-femaleness inherent in an exclusively female community alongside a hyper-masculine martial instinct and warrior nature.

The parade of queens operates as a distorted version of the parade of witches; recognisably female because they are acted by females, of course, rather than by male masquers, yet threatening to the patriarchal system because of their usurpation of martial roles. Lewalski suggests that the queens of the main masque 'appropriate, rather than destroy' the power of the witches in the antimasque.<sup>72</sup> William Blake Tyrrell notes the transformation of the Gorgon, for instance, he says, '[r]estored within her and combined with her military attributes, the Gorgon would make of Athena an Amazon'.<sup>73</sup> The transformation of the physical beauty of Medusa into the malevolence of the Gorgon mirrors in reverse the structure of *The Masque of Queens* itself, just as the structure of masque and antimasque oppose two distinct forms of female power.

This nightmare of unrestrained female autonomy is particularly rooted in a sense of history; we have seen that portrayals of 'bad' queens take familiar forms. Anna's masques, like Henry's, openly challenge the sovereign power of the king but at the same time they confirm it by affirming her position in a continuum of historical queens. In presenting the histories of women who have fought to defend their nations, Anna is appropriating the cultural and historical authority of those

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<sup>70</sup> Orgel, 'Jonson and the Amazons', p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> Schwartz, 'Amazon Reflections', p. 311.

<sup>72</sup> Lewalski, 'Anna of Denmark and the Subversions of Masquing', p. 347.

<sup>73</sup> William B. Tyrrell, *A Study in Athenian Myth-Making* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 110.

historic queens. We might consider, for example, Jonson's description of his penultimate queen, Valasca:

[w]ho, for her courage, had the surname of *Bold*. That, to redeeme her selfe, and her *sexe*, from the tyranny of Men ... led on the women to the slaughter of thyr barbarous *Husbands*, and *Lords*; And possessing them selves of theyr Horses, Armes, Treasure, and places of Strength, not only ruld the rest, but liv'd, many years after, with the liberty, and fortitude of *Amazons*.<sup>74</sup>

Valasca fulfils both a military *and* a political role; she ensures the security and permanence of her exclusively female community by killing all their oppressive husbands and by taking their assets she secures ongoing power and prestige. We can conclude from this examination of the queen's masques and also of *Kinsmen* that concerns about female community and autonomy are a recurring trait of Jacobean cultural production in the wake of the death of Elizabeth; in Jacobean England, female community is presented as newly threatening. In *Kinsmen*, Emilia re-appropriates friendship in her description of Flavina, when she argues, daringly, that 'the true love 'tween maid and maid may be | More than in sex dividuall' (1.3.81-82). The equivalence of public marriage with private friendship has the effect of rendering *both* distinctly political roles. Moreover, Emilia describes how 'Flavina took leave of the moon' – that is, died – establishing a conflation of Diana the moon goddess with Diana the goddess of chastity that signposts an unilaterally powerful female community.

This all-female community usurps male prerogative; by definition it fills a void left by inadequate male military power. Schwarz points out that Amazons in their usurpation of male military power 'pose a direct challenge to the terms of male sovereignty itself'; the queen's physical strength implies a weakness in her husband, a failure to control and to command.<sup>75</sup> The idea that militant women come about as a result of the weakness of men is also familiar from earlier chapters, particularly in allegations against Margaret of Anjou. We see in Thomas Heywood's contemporary

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<sup>74</sup> Ben Jonson, notes to 'The Masque of Queens', cited in *Ben Jonson* ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), Vol 7, p. 282, ll. 643-54.

<sup>75</sup> Schwartz, 'Amazon Reflections', p. 296.



description of Amazonian women in *Exemplary Lives* a concern that male weakness creates a problem that is addressed, or resolved, by the emergence of female valour: 'All these Heroicke Ladies are generally called Viragoes, which is derived of Masculine Spirits' and, we are told, in 'those brave and Martial Enterprises, which belong to the honour of men, this Penthesilea hath prime place'.<sup>76</sup> It is clear that the autonomous power of these women is a direct consequence of a failure by men (or 'masculine spirits') to fulfil their duties.

The presentation of queenship here is not simply monstrous, however; it also draws our attention to the ability of queens to protect their nations. The Penthesilea we see mentioned in both *Queens* and in Heywood's *Exemplary Lives*, is the chaste lover of Hercules, an ally to the Trojans who, according to long-established origin myth, were founders of Britain (Spenser describes 'bold Penthesilee, which made a lake | Of Greekish bloud so ofte in Troian plaine').<sup>77</sup> The image of Princess Elizabeth as Penthesilea in *Queens* highlights her courage, but also her role defending and promoting nationhood. At the same time, Penthesilea represents opposition between male and female because, according to myth, Achilles wants her for his wife – but only *after* he has already killed her. In other words, he wants a silent female body, without the resistance of an animate or autonomous will. In Emilia's final capitulation to Theseus in *Kinsmen*, she becomes 'extinct'; again, the idealised female condition has become an inanimate and lifeless form. So in the *Masque of Queens* as in *Kinsmen*, the disarming of the Amazon is analogous to the process of marrying her.

In contrast to Penthesilea, who is idealised as inert, Thomas Heywood describes the warrior Elizabeth actively leading her troops in defence of her nation, 'appearing in the head of her Troopes, and encouraging her Souldiers, habited like an Amazonian Queen'.<sup>78</sup> His description is strikingly similar to that of 'war-like' Pallas in Daniel's *Vision of Twelve Goddesses*, wherein she is attired 'in a blew mantle, with a siluer imbrodery of all weapons and engines of war, with a helmet-dressing on her head, and presents a Launce and Target' (59). The description directly references Elizabeth's

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts*, p. 96.

<sup>77</sup> Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.4.2.

<sup>78</sup> Heywood, *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts*, p. 211.

performance at Tilbury, an iconography which is evolving more fully in the Jacobean period, as I discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>79</sup> We see how recent history and myth collide; she calls attention to her promixity to Elizabeth and to her femininity by way of her mantle and buskin, and at the same time presents herself as a mythic Amazonian queen ready for war.

In her lifetime, Elizabeth I was loved, but also feared and sometimes hated as ‘more than a man, and (in troth) sometyme less than a woman’.<sup>80</sup> By emphasising the maleness of her body politic by way of her (putative) speech at Tilbury, Marcus suggests, Elizabeth seems to be denying that there was a woman on the throne, or at least that she as ruler was no more than a ‘mere’ woman.<sup>81</sup> By adopting the iconographical imagery of Elizabeth who by this time had huge popular nostalgic appeal, *Queens* creates an image of an autonomous and formidable English queen, one who challenges the patriarchal constraints of the court. Given that Anna hailed from Denmark and a Catholic convert, Anna’s reincarnation as Amazon points to Jacobean fears about the uncontrollable and alien nature of queenly identity even while it also sets her in an heroic historical framework.

I argued in section II that *Kinsmen* represents a post-Elizabethan effort to contain and diminish the warrior *and* the virgin queen, and to retool her as an intercessory consort. This is a process which we can see in Anna’s masques too. In Daniel’s *A Vision of 12 Goddesses*, Anna is described both as ‘heroical’ and a ‘healer’; she is a mediator; here her power is intercessory. Even in *Queens*, where she is explicitly militant, Anna is still seen as ‘the worthiest queen’; her political role is ultimately contained by the vision of the king at the end. Nevertheless, the presence of the witches and Amazons in *Queens*, the black faces of *Blackness*, the bonds between women in all Anna’s masques; these are all intended to remind us that in James’s court the idealised state of female power authorised by male power is very fragile. These instabilities reflect, in part, the recurring (and, to us, familiar) suspicion that Anna used her foreign connections to promote a

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<sup>79</sup> See page 198.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Sir Robert Cecil’s Letter to Sir John Harington, 1603’ in *Nugae Antiquae: Being a Miscellaneous Collection of Original Papers...by Sir John Harington and by Others*, ed. by Thomas Park (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1792), Volume 2, p. 264.

<sup>81</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 61.

competing political agenda to her husband's. The ritual of the masquing ceremony itself proclaimed Anna's political interference; on several occasions, for example, she openly defied her husband in flaunting her support for the Spanish ambassador over the French, rejecting diplomatic protocol which mandated alternating invitations.

James used Anna's faith to communicate with the Catholic world; her religious and national difference opened for him a new avenue for mediation with other European powers. A letter from Anna dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 1601 to Cardinal Borghese, 'the protector of the Scottish nation at Rome', clearly reveals her support for the Catholic cause.<sup>82</sup> McManus suggests that she may even have received communion at the home of the Spanish ambassador soon after her arrival in England.<sup>83</sup> The coronation of James VI of Scotland as James I of England took place on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1603 and several contemporary sources tell us that Anna refused the sacrament which McManus takes as proof that she had already converted to Catholicism. However, her public gesture of religious neutrality is more complex, perhaps; I think it likely that Anna's refusal to formalise her Catholicism enables a dialogue with *both* Protestant and Catholic audiences throughout Europe. It meant James could exploit her suspected Catholic faith to curry favour amongst European leaders even whilst making his bid for the throne in a Protestant nation.

I considered in chapter 1 an idealised intercessory queenship which manifests itself in various medieval manuals on how to be queen, for instance, in Christine de Pizan's assertion that 'women are by nature more timid and of sweeter disposition, and for this reason ... they can be the best means of pacifying men'.<sup>84</sup> Sir Antony Weldon (even whilst declaring himself no fan of King James) describes Anna approvingly as a 'brave queen that never crossed his designs nor intermeddled with state affairs, but ever complied with him'.<sup>85</sup> We have seen that the vision of a

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<sup>82</sup> British Library, MS 37201, f. 25; trans. by Robert Abercromby in *Narratives of Scottish Catholics under Mary Stuart and James VI*, ed. by William Forbes Leith (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1885), pp. 263-26.

<sup>83</sup> McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> Sir Antony Weldon, *The Court and Character of King James* (London, 1651), p. 168.

queenship that derives its power through persuasion, through political influence, recurs throughout these Jacobean masques, and it is traceable even in those which were written for the queen. We see clear references to queens' mediative power in the *Masque of Queens*, which tells us that 'every princely dame | Contends to be as bounteous of her fame | To others as her life was good to her' (416-18). This idea of reciprocal service is a recognisable aspect of a queen's intercessory power.

In *The Masque of Beauty*, performed in 1608, the nymphs derive their power from the Ocean, their own ancestor. They mediate between the Ocean and the Sun King, but their progress is halted when they are captured by Black Night. They are then rescued by their own queen and there is a contest for power between the two queens Aethiopia and Harmonia. The presentation of the women follows a convoluted path; initially described as 'painted beauties', they aim to leave '[t]heir blackness and true beauty to receive' and they enable poets to 'live again their beauties to behold' (47; 125). The insistent refrain of the masque is the ability of beauty to mediate, revive and restore. The seat of state which sits literally above the entire scene is a 'throne of beauty' because 'it was for beauty that the world was made' (243). Feminine power is also described, significantly, as conquest; Anna has the power to conquer and to dominate men by way of her beauty: 'beauty, at large, brake forth, and conquer'd men' (332). Tomlinson suggests that *Beauty* 'set the seal on Anna's appropriation of the court masque as a vehicle for self-aggrandisement'.<sup>86</sup> In this masque her beauty certainly gives her a particular form of power, which she then uses to transport, to persuade and to influence, as we can see from the song below:

Had those that dwell in error foul,  
 And hold that women have no soul,  
 But seen these move, they would have then  
 Said women were the souls of men.  
 So do they move each heart and eye  
 With the world's soul, true harmony. (306-12)

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<sup>86</sup> Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama*, p. 29.

We can understand this verb 'move' in multiple ways: to persuade, to affect, to inspire. The important point is that the women's influence, their persuasive power, is completely benign; it silences sceptics and facilitates wider harmony and unity.

In Daniel's *Love Freed*, written the following year, the queen has become captive to an evil sphinx and it is only the name Albion that secures her release; here the king represents the nation, and it is the king that is the source of all power. Any potentially subversive female autonomy is silenced in this masque. Thomas Campion's *Somerset Masque* performed for the queen in December 1613 represents Anna's last participation in active masquing. It is interesting because it offers a public assertion of her mediative power – power exercised on behalf of her husband – because it presents the moment where she enacts the formal blessing of a union (between the Earl of Somerset, Robert Carr and the Countess of Essex, Frances Howard), a union to which she was publicly opposed. In *Somerset*, Anna facilitates male heroism through the symbolic release of men by their queen; here again her public function is to affirm and uphold male chivalric performance.

We have seen in section III how the newly revived Amazon figure is ultimately contained in the masques, as it was in *Kinsmen*, via marriage. Ultimately the refrain that links all the masques is that unity and public stability comes from effective male authority over marriage. Schwarz argues that 'the Amazon Queens are mythologically remote' from the contemporaneous masque audience.<sup>87</sup> On the contrary, they represent a dangerously real female power in the light of popular nostalgia about Queen Elizabeth, which needed to be contained. Furthermore, if marriage is an allegory for the king's power over both nation and household, the masques suggest it is an alliance which renders the power of the queen implicit, rather than explicit; intercessory rather than military. What links the presentation of queenship in the masques and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is the concern about marital obligation and conquest, about the re-application of constraints on female power under the new king. To restore effective power in all these texts, we have seen that men must silence and neutralise the Amazon threat by way of marriage.

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<sup>87</sup> Schwartz, *Amazon Reflections*, p. 305.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored varied Elizabethan and Jacobean deployments of intercessory queenship; I have traced a narrative arc between the valorisation of chastity in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a new resistance to marriage in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the newly inscribed queenship of Anna of Denmark as communal and mediatory. We have seen how concern about female power within marriage is mirrored by the resurgent figure of the Amazon queen and all these texts are linked by their articulation of the problem of female influence and subversion. Whilst Emilia wants to be a warrior virgin but is compelled to marry, Anna's masques valorise marriage as facilitating benevolent political power. Jonson rewrites the Elizabethan cult of chastity in praise of mutuality in marriage and a specifically female form of influence and mediation in his masques for the queen. Like *Kinsmen*, the Jacobean court masques call for an idealisation of queen as consort and mother. The ultimate victory of James over Elizabeth is implicit in the banishment of an ideal of permanent, defiant, female chastity from James's cultural ideology.

I have shown how the queen's masques take on the chivalric Elizabethanism of the male court seen in James and Henry's masques and they upend it, bringing back a vision of militant queenship; an image of the queen at Tilbury rather than the gentler maternal figure of the male chivalric texts. The revival of the Amazon trope in *Queens* enables a sort of dystopian fictionalisation of recent English history, one in which chastity is revered over marriage. Here a newly intercessory queenship, whereby power is derived through her role as consort, wrestles with the heroic vision of Elizabeth and the emerging myth about her militancy and chastity. The masques increasingly return to and revive an older model of queenship, one that is less individualistic and more consensual, newly situated in the historic moment between the death of Elizabeth and the absorption of the Danish outsider into the new court in England.

There is a distinction in the masques between chastity, a permanent state, and virginity, a transient mark of virtue, a necessary first step on the path to marriage. The valorisation of virginity, not chastity, also renders the masques a useful comparator for *Kinsmen*. All these texts share a concern about female self-reliance as denuding a patriarchal system of the 'transactional' value of female virginity; what Pierre Bourdieu has called 'symbolic wealth'.<sup>88</sup> Although Jonson famously asserts that his invention depends upon and is subject to the authority of the queen, yet his masques ought not be read simply a straightforward celebration of the queen's agency.<sup>89</sup> Like *Kinsmen* they offer a vision of idealised marriage as a form of submission and of chastity as a form of resistance; the bride must bring 'fit use and profit' to her husband, an echo of Caxton's earlier exhortations for the queen to be 'tymerous and shamefast'.<sup>90</sup>

New Historicist efforts to read texts purely in terms of their own conditions of composition fail to look at texts as part of a useful historic continuum; they are ultimately conservative because they tend to find the re-establishment of established order and the containment of subversion. We have seen, for instance, Greenblatt's vision of literature as maintaining a conservative social order, controlling and containing its subversive elements.<sup>91</sup> Similar New Historicist arguments dominate recent criticism of the court masques of the Jacobean period. Leeds Barroll describes, for instance, how the queen's masques are generally seen as 'enhancing the regnal programmes of King James, while ladies oblivious to the serious allegorical representation and political statements of the scripts ... served as unwitting agents in these serious presentations'.<sup>92</sup> In other words, he suggests, the function of women on stage is to manifest their own subservience. I have argued here, though, that

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<sup>88</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 115.

<sup>89</sup> At the start of 'The Masque of Queens', Jonson tells us that 'her majesty had commanded me to think on some dance or show that might precede hers and have the place of a foil or false masque', *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, p. 122, lines 10-12; at the start of *Blackness*, he remarks that 'it was her majesty's will to have them blackamores at first', *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, p. 48, line 18.

<sup>90</sup> Caxton, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>92</sup> Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England: A Cultural Biography* (Washington DC.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 74.

the masques present a fictionalised version of a queen's own voice and therefore that we must read Anna's masques as part of a much broader historical debate about the autonomous performance of queenship – one which takes us right back to Guenevere's negotiation of the fragile boundaries between persuasion and assertion, resolution and division. Although autonomous female power emerges through both Elizabethan and Jacobean deployments of medieval queenship, it is in both cases strictly controlled.

We saw how *Henry VIII* re-frames controversies surrounding early Tudor queenship by refocussing on chivalric myth; it subverts expectations by using romance tropes to distance Anne Boleyn from contemporary political controversies about female subversion. I have also followed this thread of medievalism, a nostalgia about the past through the *Henry VI* plays, for example, in the meeting of Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne in *1 Henry VI*, as well as in the romance-inspired Temple Garden scene on which the whole course of Tudor history turns. Anna's masques must be seen as operating as part of a historical genre of manuals on how-to-be queen, which is why they are so concerned with their own sense of history. Just as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* represents late Shakespeare revising his own early work, the court masques engage with their own historical concerns; the narrator's comments about the time lapse between the *Masque of Beauty* and the *Masque of Blackness* (after the end of *Blackness*, the queens failed to show up for three years, described as a most 'unfit neglect') calls attention to the masques' own place in the rituals of court as well as to the constancy of their audience. The masques offer a new forum for the staging of female power, but one that is firmly rooted in historic precedent.

In conclusion, then, it seems that the fact of regnant queenship has the effect of re-animating ideals of intercessory queenship. Like Hippolyta, Anna shows an acute awareness of the distinction between the assertion of her own power and an assertion of power that is derived from her husband. Even so, it is clear that the use of mediative power is not without controversy. We saw in the opening scene of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* a magnified scene of intercessory queenship that operates as oppositional. And like other queens before her, Anna's failure to conform to her



'gendered' place in the masques takes familiar form; witch (*Queens*), warrior (*Queens*), sexual transgressor (*Blackness*). In short, the masques emphasise mutuality, familial peace and collaborative power even *while* they draw attention to potential subversion or transgressive female power.

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to highlight how the literary and dramatic discourse of queenship reflects sustained concern across time about queens' proximity to power and their ability to exert independent political influence. I have shown for the first time that literary representations of historical queens reveal an ongoing and fractious negotiation between intercessory and autonomous female power. I have also shown that the terms for condemnation or defence of such women remain remarkably static between the fifteenth century and the early seventeenth century, which suggests that even sustained periods of regnant queenship did not permanently affect the terms of expression of female power in textual and dramatic culture. To judge by literary and dramatic texts, it seems that the issue of women's proximity to power remained as perplexing and as threatening in the years following Elizabeth I's death as it had done a hundred years earlier.

Throughout my thesis I have tried to take account of what contemporary readers and audiences would have known and recognised about queenship. Obviously historical figures do not know that they are actors in 'history', but – of course – Shakespeare and his audience do know; when we read Shakespeare's histories, we are seeing the ongoing negotiation of a longstanding debate about history and about women's roles within it. Critical studies of Shakespeare's histories usually ignore aspects of queenship which he and his audience would have recognised; I have shown, for example, that *Morte Darthur* and *Henry VI* are very similar in their portrayal of the inadequacy of kings and the emergence of female agency – and community – that is seen as both inevitable and necessary. The original audience for *The Two Noble Kinsmen* would surely, if they were regulars at the Globe or the newly built Blackfriars theatre, have heard in Emilia's insistence on female community and chastity echoes of Fletcher's *Bonduca* performed less than two years earlier by the same company; the earlier play clearly hints at the potential consequences of unrestrained female militancy and communal action. Taken together, the two plays – and others in the King's Men repertory – suggest a live debate over this issue. Since discourses of queenship intertwine with and at the same time question their own literary and historiographical sources, so the question of

queens' roles must always be looked at in the context of queenship's complex textual and dramatic histories.

The problem of what makes an effective queen is a deeply rooted one. The necessity for foreign alliances means that queens are usually outsiders forced to forge new alliances in their adopted countries. They must constantly and publicly prove allegiance to their new country even whilst they use their foreign connections to expand the sphere of influence of the king. It is a hard path to navigate successfully; I have shown that suspicion about foreignness and allegations of divided loyalties recur throughout discourses of queenship. We have seen, for example, that Shakespeare's Margaret of Anjou is repeatedly criticised for her lack of foreign connections, even whilst she is suspected of giving preference to her uncle the king of Naples. Historiographical sources describing Anne Boleyn deride her lack of foreign connections and associated unfitness to be queen even *whilst* they draw attention to her scandalously French upbringing. All the queens discussed in this thesis fulfil a liminal function in that they are both subjects *and* objects of public polity. In *Kinsmen*, for example, Theseus tells Emilia, 'You are the victor's mead, the prize, the garland'; 'Know', he insists, 'of this war | You are the treasure and must needs be by | To give the service pay' (5.3.16; 30-32). Theseus clearly insists on her presence at court because it both validates male performance and rewards it.

This thesis has highlighted that as far as representations of queenship – and in particular intercessory queenship – are concerned, there is no clear divide between the medieval and the early modern. In so doing, it offers, I believe, a valuable intervention in a current critical debate. Although a number of recent critical studies have highlighted the instability of the artificial period boundary that separates the medieval from the early modern, scholarship has only just begun to acknowledge and explore Shakespeare's debts to a medieval cultural tradition, medieval romance in particular. In this thesis I have discussed how those scenes (in *Henry VI*, for example) which are mostly indebted to romance are precisely the scenes that do *not* appear amongst Shakespeare's sources and yet – despite the usual critical tendency to pay attention to Shakespearean innovation – they tend to be

ignored by critics and directors alike. I have sought to address this critical amnesia and to investigate how and why Shakespeare and his peers make use of medievalism even while they question its terms. In their reworking of historically controversial figures, my chosen texts all question the stability of our understanding of our own history; they use romance to call into question the credibility of the heroic myth of origins which kings and their queens are expected publicly to affirm. Thus on one level this thesis is an extended case study in the inadequacy of claims for a clear divide between the medieval and the early modern.

Queens' defiance is a recurring concern in discourses which seek to present an ideal of intercessory queenship; nevertheless, representations of autonomous queenship need not *always* be malign – there is also space within the discourse to talk positively about active queenship. In chapter 1 for example we saw that Malory rehabilitates Guenevere to a greater extent than is generally acknowledged. Even despite her obvious personal disloyalty to her husband, her political assertiveness and her militarism become expressions of her loyalty to her king. Unexpectedly, too, Malory's new vision of Guenevere permits a defence of Margaret of Anjou which is not couched in the norms of queenly subordination. Although we must beware of reading the *Morte* literally as *roman á clef*, nevertheless it offers an unusually benign version of a controversial queen who was an effective and stabilising political influence amidst a backdrop of civil strife and political confusion.

Throughout this thesis I have traced a series of literary moments like this where, contrary to expectations, autonomous queenship is represented as politically crucial, even heroic. In his three *Henry VI* plays Shakespeare uses romance interludes to recreate, but also to question, ideals of female influence. In chapter 2 we see that even whilst he absorbs generally hostile historiography that portrays Margaret as an usurper of power, he also questions that historiography by allowing glimpses of an autonomous military leader who is also an effective queen. Margaret wields effective and responsible sovereign power at these key moments. Shakespeare's Margaret of Anjou is the personification of female militarism yet, like Guenevere, her self-determination is always focussed on supporting and sustaining her husband's rule.

In chapter 3, I jump forwards in time to consider various texts written in the early seventeenth-century which show how the presentation of historical queens crosses erroneously-held period boundaries. Of course, Shakespeare has many defiant or unruly women in his canon, but my aim has not been to offer a canonical analysis of Shakespeare's women. In highlighting longer term trends that exist across the usual period divide between the Medieval and Early Modern, but also across the arc of Shakespeare's career, I've tried to select a few alternate examples which highlight that the fact of regnant queenship hasn't, in fact, had a massive impact. I've tried to show that ongoing concerns about intercessory *versus* autonomous queenship are *not* played out chronologically; my intention has been to consider instead a non-linear narrative which enables me to show the recasting of familiar medieval tropes of intercession under the reign of the new king, James I.

In chapter 3 I explore how the Jacobean *Henry VIII* re-frames controversies about queenship by focussing on chivalric myth; like *Henry VI* it subverts expectations by using romance tropes, in this case by creating a wholly unexpected – and counterfactual – alliance between Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn and thereby to distance Anne (and her daughter Elizabeth) from controversy. Like Guenevere and Margaret, the queens of *Henry VIII* patrol, support and validate male performance. Again here we see how writers subvert their sources so as to celebrate the necessary functioning of active queenship. Again, too, a failure in male sovereignty both explains and enables the emergence of autonomous female political power. In *Henry VIII*, the political authority of the king and his popularity are bolstered by Katherine; here she fulfils an unexpectedly vital and active political role.

Shakespeare's last play, written in collaboration with John Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, again returns to his earlier medieval theme. In particular it re-animates medieval ideals of intercessory queenship although here even intercession can be used to express defiance – in the opening scene we see a magnified scene of intercessory queenship that operates paradoxically as oppositional. In chapter 4, I trace a narrative arc from the Elizabethan *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the Jacobean *The Two Noble Kinsmen* but, crucially, I end with a detailed analysis of the re-

inscription of compliant, mediative queenship in the Jacobean court masques, even those written for the new queen herself. In the court masques, as in *Kinsmen*, female autonomy becomes an expression of open defiance and opposition to the king's will. I have shown here, too, that the court masques engage with their own historical concerns in ways that have not yet been fully realised by critics. Queen Anna's masques in particular are constantly concerned with their own sense of history; they take on the chivalric Elizabethanism of the male court and translate it into a nightmarish version of the queen as militant leader. The revival of the Amazon trope enables a sort of dystopian fictionalisation of English history, one in which chastity is revered over marriage and which, like *Kinsmen*, suggests renewed disquiet at the idea of female militancy in the wake of the death of Elizabeth.

We have seen throughout this thesis that representations of queens fluctuate between the idealisation of a submissive role and the idealisation of female agency, even, in some cases, militancy. Literature does show glimpses of queens' autonomy which is politically palatable, necessary even. Margaret of Anjou, Katherine of Aragon, Anna of Denmark; in all these cases we have seen that there *is* space to talk positively about active queenship despite the fact that representations of active queens also manifest grave anxiety about the implications of female sovereignty. What has become clear, too, is the extent to which an ideal of intercessory queenship is embedded in discourses of female power *over the long term*, even though the function of intercession is problematic because it is both empowering and humiliating for the women who need to use it.

I have tried to highlight the clear historical perspective that dominates the discourse of queenship and that has not been fully recognised by critics. We have seen that trying to create a clear division between late medieval and early modern representations of queenship is futile, and that representations of queenship don't steadily become more *modern* - in fact, they revert to earlier modes in certain political or dynastic circumstances. The wider-than-usual chronological backdrop for my study throws up the unexpected conclusion that regnant queenship does *not*

actually have the impact of valorising active queenship; on the contrary it causes a reversion to an older, medieval form of female influence. The fact of regnant queenship, in short, has the unexpected effect of reanimating ideals of intercessory queenship.

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